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MILLY'S HERO.

VOL. I.

MILLY'S HERO.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY," "UNDER THE SPELL,"

"WILDFLOWER," Etc.

"Equality is no rule in Love's grammar."

HEYWOOD.

Novel

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1866.

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250. h. 249.



LONDON
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

INSCRIBED

TO

WILLIAM HENRY PRICE, ESQ.,

AS

A SLIGHT MARK OF A FRIEND'S ESTEEM

FOR HIS

TALENTS AND HIGH CHARACTER.



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'S HERO.

VOL. I.





MILLY'S HERO.

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CHAPTER I.

A LUCKY FELLOW.

“GENTLEMEN, I need not detain you any longer with my remarks. The health, gentlemen, of Mr. Laurence Raxford.”

“The health of Mr. Raxford.” “Mr. Raxford, your health, sir.” “Here’s your good health, Mr. Raxford.” “Your very good health *and* happiness, sir!”

Mr. Raxford bowed and smiled in every direction; he was gratified at all these good wishes; more, he felt them at heart, and was grateful for them, for they *were* good wishes, and not the effervescent result of a good dinner and plenty of wine.

This was a dinner-party with a dash of novelty in it; it took place under peculiar circumstances, and there were peculiar people facing the gentleman whose health had been so heartily drunk.

The dinner was given by Mr. Jonathan Fyvie, senior, in honour of his new partner, Mr. Laurence Raxford, who had made his first appearance in that capacity at Wheal Desperation that day—coming from London and the Royal School of Mines to accept the honours of partnership with two of the richest men in Devonshire, Mr. Jonathan Fyvie, senior, and his son, also called Jonathan, and rather objecting to the cognomen.

It was a five o'clock dinner, and those who sat down to it were simply the partners in that coppermine, a clerk or two fixed to the premises, and about a dozen mining captains—men at the heads of their respective “gangs” above and beneath the surface; men who had travelled and seen life—especially mining life—in many quarters of the world; men who knew their business well, and were paid well for it; hard-featured, keen-eyed, horny-handed men, with some sense in their looks, and with opinions on business matters which were worth consulting, and which opinions had, at one time and another, put many thousands of pounds in the pockets of Fyvie and Fyvie.

One of these captains, a harder-featured, keener-

eyed, and more horny-handed man than the rest, leaned across the table with more energy or confidence than his compeers, and exclaimed,

"I knew your father—I was here when he and Mr. Fyvie had this counting-house all to themselves, and lived here night and day, and prayed for more copper and less slag."

"Ha! ha!" sang out the captains, after some furtive glances in the direction of the senior partner, whose features had relaxed at the remark of the last speaker.

"Ah! and it was Mr. Fyvie's mine then, Athorpe—not Wheal Desperation," said Mr. Fyvie, senior; "you all know the story of the new christening—and I'll tell my young friend going home. So we save time, and give Mr. Raxford an opportunity to make a longer speech."

The mining captains laughed again; Mr. Fyvie, junior, looked up and smiled at the new partner; Mr. Laurence Raxford hastened to disclaim any intention of taking up the valuable time of the gentlemen assembled round him by any long or elaborate speech. He had, in the first place, to thank them all for drinking his health,—he spoke with a rapidity of utterance and a slight nervous-

ness of demeanour natural to a young man facing his seniors; and in the second place, to assure them all that he had not come down to Devonshire as a sleeping partner, but to work with them and be one of them, above the surface, or beneath it, till he thoroughly understood the working principles of mining, and felt that he could be of service to his partners. He was grateful for the honour those partners had done him—to the unexpected honour, he might say, by adding his name to the proprietary of Wheal Desperation; he would study to deserve his promotion, and, at least, he entered upon his career with his heart in his work—with a heart full of gratitude, too, for the kind hands that had set such work before him, and made him partner in so prosperous an undertaking. I think he added that this was the happiest day of his life—he had tried very hard to dodge that phrase, but it came upon him at last, and he expressed it by way of peroration. But he meant what he said, also, for he was a happy, as well as a lucky fellow, and he entered upon a fair and rich estate at two-and-twenty years of age.

A few lines of description—the fewer the better—will serve in this place for the partners in Wheal

Desperation. Long-winded descriptions of characters, we take it, do not assist a story much in its outset.

Laurence Raxford, then,—the gentleman on his legs,—a good-looking young fellow enough, despite the absence of all classicality of feature; a fresh-coloured, hazel-eyed, chestnut-haired man, above the middle-height, with a face unmasked by whisker or moustache; rather a clever face, we might say, and a good-tempered one certainly, although he did not always look so pleased as on this particular day in May, when we find him rising to return thanks for the handsome manner in which his health had been proposed by his friend and partner Mr. Fyvie, sen.

And Mr. Fyvie, senior—tall and wiry—a man drawn out to no end of inches—a grey-haired, grey-eyed old gentleman, with a face of many wrinkles, a pair of gold-mounted spectacles, across a long, straight nose; a white, thin hand, just then clutching a pointed chin—a well-dressed, well-“got-up” individual, who might have worn a less extensive shirt collar, without losing caste in society. Still, a long throat carried his head above the plenitude of linen, over which his head

craned now and then in giraffe fashion, watching the world before him very vigilantly yet, and evidently a man not to be done by it.

Mr. Fyvie, junior.—Not quite so tall as his father, but five feet eleven, for all that. Something like his father in figure, being narrow-chested and spare, but having a face all his own—a handsome face, bright as a woman's, and with almost a womanly expression thereon—a soft, simpering, shy—his enemies said “sly”—expression, that detracted from his good looks, and was not toned down in any great degree by his long fair moustache and “weepers.”

These three men, the ruling agents from that day forth of Wheal Desperation—we shall learn more of them, and estimate them at their proper worth, before a thousand pages of this book are written.

Mr. Laurence Raxford closed his speech, and sat down amidst much hammering of knives and forks upon the table; the conversation became general after that, savouring a trifle too much of “the shop,” which was natural to a dozen men who had studied mining operations all their lives. It may be remarked here, that Captain Athorpe—the

man who had startled Laurence by the mention of his father's name—had less to say now than the rest, and seemed making amends for his former impulsiveness by the assumption of a taciturn demeanour.

Laurence glanced more than once at this man in the intervals of conversation with the captain on each side of him, and wondered why Athorpe looked at him so hard, and whether the fierceness of aspect was natural to him, or attributable to the sherry, or to his own presence there. He felt that he had dropped unceremoniously into the midst of these mining people, and might not be exactly welcome yet. In good time he would understand them all, and they would understand him, he hoped, and take to him. Everybody had taken to him, he thought, with a little self-gratulation at the reminiscence; it was his good luck to be liked; and looking back upon his past career, he could not pick out one enemy upon the road. A lucky fellow, yes!—a man whose rise in life had not brought him one envious rival, but increased the host of well-wishers round him. He was thankful for this, as well as proud of it; he had certainly endeavoured to make himself agreeable to all those

with whom he had come in contact, and he had been rewarded by the success which waits, as a rule, upon all honest attempts to gain men's esteem. In every sense of the word, a lucky fellow, then. He owned it in his speech—he confessed it to himself.

Life so smooth with him—cast, as it were, in such “pleasant places” already, that even the stolid aspect of a mining captain perplexed him, and rendered him a little restless—fidgety even, lest he should have given that man offence, or the man should have taken offence without just cause.

Captain Athorpe sat and watched him, evidently with a fierce expression of countenance—preferring to regard him in this lugubrious fashion to helping himself from the decanter at his elbow.

“Get on, Athorpe, you're licensed to be drunk on the premises to-day,” said a fellow captain in his ear. “We'll excuse it—your wife will excuse it—Mr. Fyvie will excuse it.”

Mr. Fyvie caught the full meaning from the last words, which had arrested his attention.

“To be sure I will,” he cried laughing; “he who spares the wine to-day insults my butler, and

doubts the genuine nature of the vintage. Athorpe, your glass is empty."

"And will keep empty, Mr. Fyvie," was the blunt but not rude answer. "I did not know it was so strong. I'm not used to wine drinking."

"You—a traveller, too!"

"I've been drinking long enough. Hold hard, Peters!" he cried, as Peters attempted to fill his glass surreptitiously, and was rewarded for his pains by nearly having the decanter knocked out of his hands—"when I say a thing I mean a thing—don't you know that by this time?"

"Well, dorm it, you needn't ride rusty about it," said Peters in an aggrieved tone, wiping some splashes of sherry off a pair of white trousers that he had donned for the occasion, "or make this mess. Just look here, now."

"I don't want any more wine. I've had more than enough already," grumbled Captain Athorpe, turning his back upon his persecutor.

"Very well, then. Perhaps you'll give us a song," said Captain Peters sharply, at which suggestion there was a roar of laughter at Captain Athorpe's expense, and at which Athorpe himself condescended to smile grimly.

"He who has seen me drunk has heard me sing," said Athorpe.

"Athorpe has not sung since his marriage," cried a new voice from the remote end of the table, and the joke went against the fierce man again, who shrugged his shoulders, and tried to smile—this time with an evident effort.

The presence of the principals had evidently no depressing effect on these men ; they were quite at home there, ready with their jests, quick with their answers, loud voiced, hilarious, and free-spoken. They were all equals in that long, low room, the windows of which looked upon the mining-grounds, and there was nothing in the manner of the masters to damp the spirits of the general community. Once a year, in the middle of the month of May, Mr. Fyvie and son dined with their leading men, and there were feasting and revelry, in lieu of figures at the office—once a year, in commemoration of the birth of Wheal Desperation. Masters and men, all "hail-fellows well met" on that special occasion, however much at arm's-length the remainder of the year through—liberty, fraternity, and equality, and nobody the worse for the alliance.

Presently there was considerable tobacco smoke, Mr. Fyvie and his son indulging in long clay pipes with the rest—Laurence and Captain Athorpe alone remaining non-consumers.

"You don't smoke, then?" cried Athorpe across the table to the new partner, with a suddenness that was startling.

"Very little," responded Laurence, with a laugh, "and never before supper."

"You're better without it altogether. It's a nuisance, as well as a bad habit. Your father never smoked."

"Indeed?"

"Not but what he was a poor weak fellow enough, for all that," affirmed Captain Athorpe; "you're like him about the eyes. I have been trying to think all this time where the likeness lay. Like him, sir, about the eyes," he repeated, addressing the senior partner of the mine.

"Who's that?—like whom, Athorpe?" asked Mr. Fyvie, with characteristic sharpness.

"I'm thinking that the young master here is like his father, after all, across the eyes—so," and Athorpe drew his horny hand sideways across the bridge of his nose.

"Yes, there's a faint likeness," said Mr. Fyvie—"I see it; why you should, I don't exactly make out. You were not six months with us then."

"*His* father discharged me—I offended him; he did not like to hear the truth, poor man."

"Yes, yes, yes, I remember now," answered Mr. Fyvie quickly; "you offended him—exactly. You had a habit of offending people when you were younger; but you've grown out of that, thank God! I'll take a glass of wine with you, Captain Athorpe."

Captain Athorpe reddened very much at the compliment, hesitated, finally stretched out his hand sideways for the decanter, keeping his eyes fixed upon his employer.

"What are you groping after, Captain?" asked Peters, ironically.

"Sherry," growled the other—"Mr. Fyvie drinks wine with me."

"Oh! I thought when you said a thing you *meant* a thing," said Captain Peters, as he passed the wine to him.

Athorpe filled his glass in silence, raised it, met his patron's glance, bowed, and drank his sherry—

drank it off at one gulp, as though in defiance of his late resolution, or the taunt of his friend. When Mr. Fyvie passed his hand over his thin nose and mouth an instant afterwards, as though to repress an effort to smile, the man whom he had especially favoured was still staring at him intently.

"I believe he did it on purpose," grumbled Athorpe to his left-hand neighbour.

"A joke of his, very likely," replied the man addressed, an old and white-haired Nestor of the mines; "he was a rare fellow for his jests once. I mind him forty-five years ago at Wheal Fellowship, in Cornwall, as full of mischief as a monkey."

"Ah! you always knew more than anybody else," said Captain Athorpe, brusquely; and having succeeded in disturbing the equanimity of the gentleman on each side of him, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and was isolated for the remainder of the feast.

The feast was at an end by seven o'clock, and there was a general rise as the great clock struck in the corner.

"An hour behind time," said Mr. Fyvie, to his

new partner. "What will the ladies say to us, Laurence?"

"They will forgive us, I hope, in consideration of the special character of this festivity," was the reply.

"Well, they should do so—and we'll make atonement for our sins of omission, lad. Jonathan, you return home on that wild horse, I presume, instead of accepting a snug corner in your father's carriage?"

"Well, I must get him home somehow, sir," said Jonathan, with a laugh.

Mr. Fyvie turned to his head-clerk, a portly gentleman, who had also grown grey in the service, as most men might, if it pleased them and their God, after once working for Wheal Desperation.

"It has been a general holiday here, Waters?"

"Of course, sir."

"All going on well?"

"As well as ever, Mr. Fyvie. Everything slow and sure," he added, rubbing one hand over the other, "but going on well—everything."

"And where's everybody?"

"Eh, sir?"

"What are they all doing with themselves to-day in the village—holiday-making?"

"And love-making, sir," added Mr. Waters, who was evidently a bit of a wag, considering his years.

"Ah ha! and love-making. Love and idleness together. You hear that, Laurence? Nothing like hard work to dissipate the frivolities."

"You'll not escape an ovation, I'm afraid, for all the idleness, sir."

"Eh!—what's that? Why shan't I?"

"They've been coming up from the village the last two hours to see you off, sir. I think we have all the hands upon the ground again."

"Put them all to work, the lazy rascals, and idle hussies, who ought to know better," cried Mr. Fyvie. "Where's the carriage? Let me escape the clamour of the mob. Captains, good evening. Come, Laurence."

"Good evening, sir, good evening. A happy year to you, sir, until we meet again."

"Meet again! Why, I may be here to-morrow. You have not got rid of me for twelve months. You fellows, don't think that. I shall be down upon you like an avalanche this year, so keep straight, and to the mark. Good night."

They were echoing his good night when he was outside the brick house that was built on his estate; they were following him with their good wishes, when he and Laurence found themselves the centre of six or seven hundred men and women, of all ages, but of one degree, all bustling round the carriage and pair, and waiting to catch a glimpse of "the master."

The keen face took a new light from the interest which it had awakened; much of the sharpness, or the worldliness, vanished away at the sight of the many dependents, ranged in two long rows from the counting-house to the carriage-steps, all anxious to see the principal, who seldom troubled them, and who was like a king to them.

"Glad to see you—glad to see you all," he cried, in cheery accents, "well and strong, and so bravely dressed that I fancy I must be paying every one too well here."

"Oh! noa, sir," laughed the men, and simpered the women, and a flutter of delight at the master's words vibrated like an electric current through the crowd.

"Where's Jonathan?" he said to Laurence.

"The young master rode off at once on the

black horse, sir," a man volunteered to inform Mr. Fyvie.

"Ah! he don't like deputations—too fussy for him," remarked Mr. Fyvie, in a lower tone. "And here's another young master for you, to look after your interests, and fight your battles when I am gone. He has come here to take a little of the hard work off my shoulders, and let me rest a little more!"

This was a jest, but no one saw it, or received it as a jest. They regarded Mr. Laurence Raxford with intense veneration, as another demigod coming from heaven to watch over them, and give them wages.

"So the world goes round, you see, and the old men give place to the young. Good night to all of you."

"Good night, sir, good night," was echoed from all sides, and one "God bless you!" rang out sweet and silvery from the midst of the crowd.

The blessing did not fall unheeded on the old man's ears, and he turned very quickly in the direction whence the words had issued.

"Ah! are you there, Milly?" he said, nodding his head towards the last speaker, and laughing;

"it wouldn't have been quite complete without you and your greeting. Here, Laurence, this is the prettiest girl in Devon."

"Oh! sir," cried Milly, disappearing at this compliment, and shutting out the fair prospect to which Mr. Fyvie had directed the attention of his junior partner, who met with a host of gaping and laughing faces instead.

"Off like a lapwing. Now, Laurence, let us follow her example."

The carriage was entered, and the doors closed. The coachman lashed his pair of thoroughbreds, and amidst a humming of women's voices, a waving of hands and handkerchiefs, and an English cheer from the men, that woke the sleepy echoes of the Dartmoor hills, the proprietors of Wheal Desperation were whirled away from business.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF WHEAL DESPERATION.

MR. FYVIE with his face, and Mr. Laurence Raxford with his back to the horses, ensconced themselves in snug corners of the carriage.

"Jonathan will be home with that brute an hour before us," said Mr. Fyvie; "*an avant courier*. Well, what do you think of my captains?"

"An honest and a hearty set of men," said Laurence, immediately.

"You will get on with them very well—they're an independent lot; but you're no more likely to upset their good opinions of themselves and their styles of going to work, than Jonathan or I are."

"No, sir. Not likely."

"You come fresh from the Royal School of Mines, full of book knowledge and running over with experiments—you will find my captains pay

respect to your learning, to all the theories with which you may be acquainted; but you will not lure them easily and without sound reasons from the beaten track."

Laurence laughed.

"Not Captain Athorpe, at all events."

"No, not Captain Athorpe," was the dry response; "he has the very finest opinion of his abilities—I can't say I like the man, or his manners, and I am thankful that I see little of him. A fellow of an excellent memory, Laurence."

"Evidently, sir."

"I don't envy you the next six months—and really, though I admire your principle of seeing for yourself everything around you, it is scarcely necessary to become so *bonâ-fide* a working partner."

"Oh! yes, it is, Mr. Fyvie," answered the other, with enthusiasm; "I don't want to play the fine gentleman here, but to work for my share of the profits, just as I intended to work for the sake of experience, before you surprised me with your kindness—your generosity."

"Pooh! pooh! my forethought, if you looked at the matter in the right light, Laurence; for the

mine wouldn't get on with my sleepy-headed son to manage it. There's no fire in that youth—and Wheal Desperation would go back twenty years. You, I have been watching."

"Ah! yes—thank you," answered Laurence.

"There, we'll have no more expressions of gratitude," said Mr. Fyvie, almost tetchily; "I object to grateful people—I like people to act their good feelings towards me, and sink the demonstrations. You come here and fall in love with my daughter—like your impudence," added the old gentleman; "and I suppose my daughter fell in love with you—like her forwardness, and the thing being settled, everybody looks to me for marriage portions. A very good joke—but at my expense, eh?"

"I did not ask you for a marriage portion, sir—I did not expect one."

"Exactly—and you have not got one. I constitute you partner in the mine—you will for the present take but a small portion of the profits; when you are married, a larger share; when I am dead, one half."

"May that——"

"Yes, yes; but I suppose I shall die some day.

I don't care much about it at present, and therefore we will not dwell on that topic. You're a lucky fellow, a great many think, to drop into a partnership so easily, and ensnare—so easily, too—Jonathan Fyvie's daughter ; but I think"—laying his hand suddenly on the young man's knee—"that I am the luckier fellow of the two, for everything that I have wished—everything that your mother and I have planned together, like a couple of old conspirators, has come true to the very letter of our scheming. My dear Laurence, I never was more happy."

"It *was* your wish, then—as well as hers?"

"Certainly it was. I didn't want a rich son-in-law—or a proud one—some inanity with a title and a lisp, who would pocket my savings, and then look down on the connection. I simply looked out for Laurence Raxford, and waited patiently for him."

"All this for my sake, air—how can I ever thank you?"

"Partly for yours, for I saw that you were a steady young man—partly for my own—partly for my son's, for he needs a counterpoise—and partly for the sake of my dead friend."

"My father."

Mr. Jonathan Fyvie's face assumed a shade more gravity of expression.

"Yes, your father. He and I, two orphan boys, began life together as clerks at a Cornish mine—worked on together—became partners in the mad scheme of sinking a shaft or two on the Dartmoor ground, where we have dined to-day."

"Is this the story which you promised to tell me this evening?"

"Exactly so. Now, keep your mouth shut, Laurence, whilst I run through it as briefly as I can. I shall have finished in five minutes."

He looked at his watch, and then darted into his subject.

"Your mother is aware of the story, or the greater part of it; but it was a promise between her and me that I should have the telling of it, somewhat after this fashion, and, if possible, under these very circumstances. All mapped out like a book, you see, and all coming true, not after the fashion of books, by any means, and there the advantage lies with us. To have known this story in your youth would have rendered you dis-

contented, morose, selfish—at all events, seeing more selfishness in others than they were endowed with, perhaps. Well, we are beginning with a windy preface, and I am terribly loquacious.”

“Not at all, sir.”

“And I so fidgety under other people’s talk, too—egad, another good joke. I hope that sherry has not been a trifle too much for me.”

He laughed pleasantly, and then grappled with his subject in earnest.

“Your father and I were unsuccessful; we spent nearly all our money on rash ventures; we found our judgment at fault, and our bankers grumbling at the smallness of our accounts—poor things! Small accounts are great troubles to everybody, you see? We two young men, who had started in life with fair legacies, were reduced at last to three thousand pounds between us. Your father grew nervous—he was not a strong man, and he thought that I was a very rash one. So I was—so I was. Sleepy Laurence was right enough; I was very desperate just then. I wanted to sink everything in the mine, and make another dash for copper in a new direction. Your father was despondent, and ‘caved in.’ We dissolved partnership—he went

abroad, and left me to make shift with fifteen hundred pounds; and I came here one night—one bitter night it was to me!—and looked at the mine, and at the wreck of good intentions that were scattered about, significant of my ruin, and your father's. Well, looking at that wreck, with the Dartmoor hills frowning at my misfortunes, I made up my mind to go on with the scheme from which your father had withdrawn. I was annoyed with him, poor fellow, and I was a young man, hot-headed and obstinate. I looked upon fifteen hundred pounds as valueless to me with my ambitions; and I made up my mind to let it all go after the rest, and then pitch myself down the deepest shaft, or slip out of the world in some fashion or other, when the last penny was sunk. To tell you the truth, I was in love, too—in love with Hester's mother, who was a woman of position, and whose family was so high that it looked down upon heaven—and so I was mad at all points. Everybody said so—I knew it myself—but I sank my money like a fool, and was rewarded, as fools are sometimes in this world of ours, and for wiser purposes than we wot of. When I had only twenty-three

pounds in the world—it was twenty-three pounds, twelve and sixpence, for I counted it in my bed-room at the hotel, and *felt the edge of my razors* afterwards—by Heaven, sir!” he cried enthusiastically, “we came to copper—as fine a vein of copper as any in Devon, and I was rich from that day. That’s the story of Wheal Desperation, Laurence, and now you know what a pig-headed father-in-law you are likely to be blessed with.”

“I admire your courage, sir.”

“It was simply despair,” said the senior partner; “I did not hope for riches, Hester’s mother, anything, when my luck came. I was content with fishing up lumps of quartz and grains of copper, and losing by every truck-load that was drawn to the surface. It was dogged despair that brought me a fortune—I hold my breath now when I think of it, for I might have been at this very hour licking out my wooden bowl of skilly in the union, if I had had the weakness to live after my loss. *But*—I should have died.”

Laurence believed that, noting how the old man’s lips compressed, and the brow contracted. Yes, Mr. Fyvie had been a desperate man in his

youth, and had gone to work in a desperate way, seldom rewarded by such good fortune in the end as his had been.

"Your father, Laurence, made a thousand or two abroad; he came back to England, married, and died, seeing his old friend at the very last, not before, for he was jealous of my prosperity, poor fellow! He left your mother and you just enough to live on, and I looked after you both in due course. Then I told your mother what I wished to make of you—just as I told your father on his death-bed what I intended to do—what I felt bound to do for the sake of the old partner who had first ventured with me, and whose sunken money was, after all, but the prelude to my greatness. Then, Laurence, your father understood me better."

Laurence looked down, and his lip quivered a little. He understood the old man better also; he felt that for that man he must work and sink self, and try to deserve his good fortune, as he did not deserve it yet awhile.

"You have been very kind," he murmured.

"Tut, tut; I have been very wide-awake," was the answer; "I have been making a partner after

my own heart for the last ten years, and if you had not turned out well in the casting, I should have set you aside as a flawed and valueless article—kicked you out of my sight with a beggarly income, Laurence.”

Laurence laughed.

“Oh! I do not believe that now. I read your character, sir, very clearly.”

“Do you?” was the sharp reply—“you’re a wiser man than your contemporaries, then. Do you see that I have talked myself into a comatose state, and am going to take my usual afternoon nap?—seeing that, don’t disturb me by any more loquacity.”

Mr. Fyvie tilted his hat over his eyes, which he closed at once; and Laurence, respecting his wish, sat very silent in his corner of the carriage, wistfully regarding the patron, guardian, and friend, and thinking once again of the luck that had fallen to his share. He was very grateful, too, for only a little while ago he had been perplexed about his future, and half angry with his mother for thinking so little about it. He had been a poor young man, with somewhat high notions for his position, and his mother had rather fostered them

than otherwise, till at one-and-twenty they had begun to prey upon him. He had fancied that he should be a clerk, or a manager, in Mr. Fyvie's service—earn three or four hundred a year in due course; but that prospect had hardly contented him, and two months ago he had gone down to Mr. Fyvie's house just a trifle discontented with himself and his chances, and aggravated by his mother's complacency.

Even as a guest of his father's old friend, he had been unsettled, for he was a sensible young man for his age, and it had struck him that this new sphere was artificial, and did not belong to him, or suit him. All very pleasant—far too pleasant—but likely to make the future very dull when the fine house, and all this fine company, became a retrospect. It made him ambitious and envious, he thought; he was sure, even then, sitting in a corner of the carriage, looking back upon his past sensations, that he had been ambitious, and inclined, just a little, to scheme for that position which had actually been determined upon when he was a boy at school. That made him ashamed of himself, and he hoped that no one had seen his efforts to ingratiate himself into the

favour of the Fyvies, male and female, whom he had met at the great house. He had only striven to render himself agreeable to everybody, and that was natural enough in Laurence Raxford; but he fancied that he had striven a little too eagerly, because the Fyvies did live in a great house, and could advance his interests in the world.

He was sure that he felt small—exceedingly small—and that after that day he must work with a great effort for the interests and the happiness of those who would be his relations as well as his partners.

“By George!” he said to himself, “how I will work; they shall never regret giving me a lift in the world.”

He muttered many protestations of this kind—this young man with his heart full, and with a wild and unguessed life before him—causing Mr. Fyvie to open his eyes once or twice with a jerk, and regard him attentively.

“Aren’t you well, Laurence?” he asked at last.

“Well, sir—but full of soliloquy.”

“Ah! that’s the potatoes—hard bullets of things—I’d swear Waters cooked them—the old potterer! Where are we?”

"Not off the moor yet."

"Confound it, another half hour's ride!" said Mr. Fyvie, "and my long legs full of cramps already! Don't soliloquize any more—there's a good fellow. It's a bad habit, and can't do anybody good. Oh! dear."

And Mr. Fyvie yawned and stretched himself, and finally went off to sleep again, leaving his more wakeful companion to look out upon the dark landscape.

So on for another half hour, a descent down-hill, a turn out of the main-road, a sharp curve to the right through a pair of open lodge gates, at which a man was standing with a lantern—and then Mr. Fyvie was awake for good.

"Home at last," he cried letting down the window suddenly; "I'm glad of it, though I wish the house, *entre nous*, was less full of company for once. I would be in bed before another hour struck, and now I've to dress—ugh! that's aggravating after a mining dinner."

A long carriage-drive ending in a noble mansion, its windows full of light and life that May night. A man darted from the house before the equipage had stopped, and opened the carriage door, erect

and obsequious as six feet of stature and a tight suit of Fyvie livery could make him.

"Hang it ! I can hear myself creak as I walk," said the master getting out of the carriage very gingerly. "Here, Laurence, your arm, or I shall be saying my prayers on this gravel. Mr. Jonathan's home I suppose, Ranwood?" he asked of the domestic.

"No, sir—not yet."

"Not yet, eh ?—why, where the deuce has he got to ? Well, thank the Fates that I am at home, at any rate !"

CHAPTER III.

A HOUSE FULL OF PEOPLE.

HALF AN HOUR afterwards, Mr. Fyvie and Laurence Raxford were in the drawing-room of Tavvydale House. A large drawing-room, that "cost money." That was the first thought which rose to the mind of a person entering the state room—one was not so struck with the elegance or the grace of the furniture and its surroundings, as with the money that had been lavished there. It was an apartment that appealed to your sense of costliness, and though it was neither garish nor vulgar, yet the impression seized you on the threshold that it was the room of a man who had not been rich all his life, and who, with money at command now, was letting the world see what a show he could make.

The furniture was as rich, choice and *new* as an upholsterer with a *carte-blanc* could set there; there

were some thousands of pounds worth of ornaments about the room and on the mantelpiece ; the carpet had taken one of the first prizes at an International Exhibition ; the lace curtains, sweeping from the gilded cornices above the windows, had been copied for an engraving in an Art Journal, and the piano, in its marqueterie work case, had not its equal in all England.

A young lady was sitting at that piano when Mr. Fyvie and Mr. Raxford entered the room—a fair-haired, tall, and graceful girl, somewhat too pale, perhaps, to please all tastes, and whose features might have been considered a trifle too sharp—too much of the Jonathan Fyvie cut about them—to have stamped their owner as a beauty infallible. Still she was a pretty, if delicate-looking, girl, with a figure fit for a duchess, and a straight nose, like her father's, that touched the susceptibilities of the aristocrats, who wanted straight noses all to themselves.

Hester Fyvie looked round with a smile of welcome at the new comers, but continued to dash on with her symphony—and catching that smile, as you and I, reader, pass into the room with the partners, we can judge how sweet was its expres-

sion, and what a character—soft and womanly and beautiful—it gave to the whole face. Yes, this Laurence Raxford was a very lucky fellow!

The room was full of company; Mr. Fyvie had found means to fill his house, though London was beginning its season, and fashionable people were thick as thieves in London streets. Mr. Fyvie had met with no difficulty in finding friends to accept his kind invitation—gentlemen in his position seldom are troubled and vexed by kind regards and compliments, but regret the inability, &c. There was plenty of first-rate wine to drink, plenty of horses to ride, fine shooting and hunting in their seasons—in fact, at Tavvydale House a man or woman was always happy, for its owners tried very hard to render everybody so.

It is not our task to sketch all the guests assembled at Tavvydale House that year—but there are a few whom we cannot pass over in silence, who have their big and little parts to play in future pages.

Mrs. Fyvie cannot be overlooked in the first place, though it was her misfortune to be overlooked a great deal in real life. A tall woman, like the rest of the Fyvies, “very high in her no-

tions," it was said, as befitted that high family to which the senior partner of Wheal Desperation had already alluded, but sitting there in her lounge chair the picture of meekness and placidity—a white-faced, languid lady, in black silk and diamonds. Evidently a lady with not much will of her own, and who found "company-keeping" a somewhat hard task for her that evening—she looked so unutterably weary.

By her side, Mrs Raxford, mother to our hero—for Laurence is as much of a hero as the reader will catch sight of in the progress of *this* history. Mrs. Raxford, short, plump and prim, with a rosy pair of wrinkled cheeks, and a shower of silver ringlets on each side of a face that was a very motherly and kind one, despite a set expression thereon at that juncture, suitable for the grand folk assembled about her. She also smiled her welcome to the senior and junior partners as they came into the room, and looked a little disappointed when the latter was button-holed, by a wiry-haired individual, on his way across to her.

Then there were the Llewellyns—branches of the great family whence Mr. Fyvie had plucked that languid lady in black silk—four of them

present in the flesh to overawe and chill the rest of the community. Mrs. Llewellyn, an elder sister of Mrs. Fyvie, by a year and a half, also a tall woman, with an inflexible back, a carrotty head of hair, and a quantity of jingling little gold ornaments in her carrots, an iron-featured woman, with washed-out eyes and high cheek-bones, who, in a blue serge jacket and short skirt, with a basket of fish at that inflexibility already hinted at, would have represented a Newhaven fish-wife to the life. Mr. Llewellyn, short, but stiff and starchy, with one of the largest white ties ever seen out of a pantomime—a first cousin to his wife, and rather sorry for it, perhaps—stood with his back to the mantelpiece, his hands behind him, and his feet planted firmly on the hearth-rug, a man who, in his own opinion, evidently did honour to Tavvydale House by his presence, and deserved a testimonial, a vote of thanks, or something in that line, for leaving his post and his snug room in the Treasury, to patronize his relations at that time of year. At his side Miss Llewellyn, tall, like her mother, and almost as upright and carrotty, but with a meek and pasty face, that evinced less firmness of character. Scattered about on chairs,

couches, and ottomans, possibly a dozen more people—a great gun and his wife from Plymouth, the first-named also in the mining way; a fourth Llewellyn, the eldest son of the inflexibility, a young man who has but little to do with us, and who had been seized with the natural idea that if his uncle had wanted a partner, he might have sent for him, —therefore a gentleman who loved not Laurence Raxford; the family solicitor and his son; a London physician, and the gentleman who pounced on Laurence as he entered, and who, having a place in the book, is entitled to an outline sketch with those who have preceded him.

A wiry-haired man, of Laurence's height, and Laurence's age, wearing spectacles, a swarthy man, with a high, broad forehead, and large bony hands, which opened and shut with suppressed excitement when there was nothing in them, or to catch hold of in reach. A man of good family, and considerable property into the bargain, therefore one of the few whom the Llewellyns could take to their bosoms, but, alas! one of the many who fought shy of the Llewellyns, and a man who had his private opinions as to the desirability of their acquaintance.

"Mr. Raxford," he said, fastening on to the

lappets of our hero's dress-coat, before he had made four steps into the room, "did you ask about that for me?"

"About what, Mr. Engleton?" asked the forgetful Laurence.

"Why, good gracious, sir, you have never forgotten all about it!" exclaimed his disappointed *vis-à-vis*.

"Oh! I beg pardon, yes, I have. You see, it was rather confusing for me to-day, and, after all, there is plenty of time. Why, to-morrow I shall have all day to think of it, or, better still, you can come over to the mines with me, and make your own inquiries."

"It's no good my coming over," said Mr. Engleton, leaving go one lappel to bite the tips of his fingers nervously. "I have made all my calculations, and I only want you to verify a few of the figures."

"I'll ask one of the captains to-morrow," said Laurence. "Let me see, what am I to ask, now?"

"God bless me, what a memory you have, and what an interest in the social condition of the mining classes! Sit down a bit, please, and we'll run over these papers again. I have them all in my pocket."

"Oh! have you?" said Laurence. "Very well, we'll go into them in a minute or two. My mother is beckoning me, I think, just now."

"I beg her pardon," said he, politely bowing in Mrs. Raxford's direction, much to her sudden confusion. "You'll not be long, then?"

"Not very long, I hope," replied our hero, effecting his escape at last.

Mrs. Raxford welcomed her son with a true mother's smile, and gathered her skirts closer to herself, to make room for him on the couch at her side, an invitation which he did not accept, however.

"So the day of inauguration is over, Laurence, at last?"

"Yes, and I have been formally introduced at the mines as the junior partner. I got over the whole affair better than I expected, almost gracefully, mother, by George!"

"Hush, dear, don't swear, they may think it low," said Mrs. Raxford, looking rather nervously round her.

Laurence laughed.

"Oh! they'll forgive me—at least, a few of them will. What have you been doing all day?"

His mother told him. There had been walking in the grounds, a drive out with Mrs. Fyvie, a dinner, and then a gathering together of social atoms in that drawing-room.

"It's very nice, of course, all this, very genteel ; but,"—dropping her voice into a frightened whisper—"oh ! Laurence, dear, I shall be so glad to get home !"

"Bustling about that little quiet place, and flourishing the inevitable duster—to be sure you will. We shall all be glad to settle down again."

"And when I have arranged everything, how delightful to come back to another little quiet place near here, and take care of you, dear," said the mother, archly. "That was the dream you had once, before Hester and you understood each other."

"What a rare conspiracy it has all been for my rise in life," he replied, smiling ; "and I, the victim, have cause to rejoice at it. But——"

"But what ?" asked the mother.

"Well, I don't know that there's a 'but' in the case," he answered, quickly, "not even a crumpled rose-leaf anywhere. Why, I never expected this good fortune, and I don't believe that I deserve it."

"You deserve everything, my dear boy, for you have been always to me——"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted; "but don't turn my head with my own amiabilities just at present. I am as perfectly aware that I am the best son that ever lived—of course I am!—as that you are the best mother, spoiling me a little with your praise, as mothers with only sons always do."

Mrs. Raxford made a clutch at his hand, which he laughingly withdrew from hers.

"Society," he cried, with harmless satire, "this high-bred and exquisite society. If the Llewellyns should see us!"

"Oh! they are dreadful people," exclaimed the mother, with a glance in the direction of Mrs. Llewellyn, sitting in an erect position, and with a basilisk stare in their direction. "But sit down, Laurence, I haven't had a long chat with you for a week."

"My dear mamma, I have not spoken to Mrs. Fyvie or Hester yet. Monopoly at Tavvydale is impossible."

"Well," with a sigh, "I suppose so. But I shall come to your room to-night—just for a little while—to wish you joy of—of all this!" spreading

out her hands suddenly, as though the drawing-room furniture was included in that day's good luck.

"Very well, then I'll not turn the key on visitors until you bid me good night."

"There's a dear boy!"

Laurence was allowed to withdraw after this promise; he steered his way through the guests, a man at his ease there, a man thoroughly at home, and secure of his position. He stopped to speak to Mrs. Fyvie *en route*, bringing a smile to her pale face more than once by his remarks on passing things; he dodged Mr. Engleton very cleverly, and with apparent innocence, round a settee on which three dowagers, with voluminous skirts, had placed themselves. He was at last by the side of Hester Fyvie, coming in at the end of the symphony in very good time, so that, as she rose from the music-stool, she and her betrothed were face to face together. Nothing more natural than that they should walk away together, and sit down, just a little apart, for awhile, from the rest of the people.

"In at the death, Hester," he said.

"Meaning that I have been murdering Beet-

hoven, sir?" was the playfully reproachful answer.

"No—you have buried him with becoming grace," replied Laurence. "Not that I admire symphonies much at any time—they're such long-winded affairs!"

"And you so great a Goth, Laurence! There, I do not believe that you like music at all."

"I could exist without it," was the dry answer; "at all events, without concertos, and symphonies, and all three volume harmonies. Now, 'Home Sweet Home's' first-rate."

"That implies that you are tired of Tavvydale House, Laurence."

Hester Fyvie was very quick in her replies. There was a Fyvie sharpness in her answers as well as in her features; but there was a crispness—sweet and melodious, too—that rendered her responses very pleasant at that time.

"Do you think so?"

"I don't know what to think of you sometimes," she replied. "I don't believe, sir, that you are aware yourself what a strange and restless being you are."

"No—upon my honour, I am not aware of that."

"And I should like to know, Laurence—very much like to know—what you were thinking about this morning before you started with papa and Jonathan for the mines?"

"Thinking!" said Laurence, very much surprised; "I don't remember. How do you know that I was thinking—at all? Why, I never think—upon my honour, I am the most thoughtless being under the sun."

"Thoughtless of sunstrokes, for I longed to come out and pelt you with that ugly felt hat which you had left in the hall."

"Pray be good enough to explain—this is becoming interesting. Sybil of Tavvydale, I conjure you to speak."

"You don't remember sitting in the full blaze of the morning's sun, on the lawn beyond there"—pointing to the drawing-room window—"staring and thinking—thinking and staring—down at your feet, like a—like a great goose?"

"It's the habit of geese to think and stare in that manner, perhaps," he laughed; "but upon my word, Hester, I don't remember it."

"Upon your word and honour?"

"Upon both those valuable perquisites."

"There, that makes my words out. You *are* strange, odd, and restless. To fall into a syncope for three-quarters of an hour this morning, and not remember anything about it. Now, Laurence, I really don't——"

"Don't believe me—after pledging no end of good faith to convince you. Thank you—so the fair sex doubt all honourable protestations. I might have sat down for a moment—very likely; but I don't try to remember every time I sit down."

"If it were not for Aunt Llewellyn looking at us, I'd box your ears," she cried, raising her hand a little way, and then letting it drop again, nearer to him, half hidden in the folds of her dress, where he found it, and pressed it in his own for a moment, bringing the blushes to her face, and the light to her eyes.

"Don't, sir," she gently remonstrated; "let my hand go."

"It *was* only for a minute, then?"

"It was for three-quarters of an hour."

"Consider yourself my prisoner of war, until you confess to a gross exaggeration of the facts."

"I defy you."

"Show me the seat whereon I sat dreaming—thinking of you, perhaps. The window is ajar, and one step takes us both into the moonlight, Miss Juliet."

"Thank you, Romeo; but I can't neglect my father's guests for the sake of catching a cold, and looking at a garden-seat. And if you don't let go my hand—somebody will see you."

"Hester, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Llewellyn at the same instant, "can I speak to you for a moment?"

"Certainly, aunt." And Hester rose at once, and, with a comical little glance at Laurence, vanished from his side.

"If ever there were an aggravating old woman—I suppose such a phenomenon has occurred once or twice—it's that red-haired ogress of an aunt," muttered Laurence to himself; "and I was feeling so comfortable, natural, and genuine. By George!"—this appeared to be a favourite oath of his—"I believe she does it to aggravate me. I wonder what I have done to offend her."

He looked after Hester; he noticed that she sank gracefully down by the side of her aunt. He wished that he could hear what they were talking

about ; and had he heard, it would not have made much difference in his opinion of the one or the other just then.

"Hester, my dear," said the grating voice of Mrs. Llewellyn, "I really *do* wonder how you can behave so. An engagement is all very well, and proper under most circumstances—but you, educated with my own Jane, too, should show a little more respect to society, even a little more attention to your friends here, who have a right to consider—I think I may add a right—that there is some one else in the world worthy of notice besides that young man opposite."

Hester took this reproof very good-humouredly.

"Why, aunt, I have not spoken to Mr. Raxford all day before this."

"You would have sat there all night," was the sharp answer.

"No, I should not," was the quiet reply.

A trifle too quiet—for Hester's face began to assume a grave expression, as though the last remark had somewhat disturbed its owner.

"And you will pardon me, niece—but——"

"And you will pardon me, aunt," was the rapid

interruption here, "but I really don't admire any remarks upon my behaviour—you know how hasty I am—and how I object to any one, except pa and ma, calling me to account. I can take their scoldings humbly enough—but oh! I get so cross if any one else attempts."

"Your papa and mamma have completely spoiled you."

"Well, I think that they have sometimes."

"They give you entirely your own way."

"Bless them both—I am very grateful for it."

"Now, Jane——"

"Who is flirting desperately with Mr. Engleton, aunt. Only look at them," she cried with a mock alarm, that must have been rather irritating to Mrs. Llewellyn, "taking no notice of the general company, but screwed up in a corner like turtle doves in a nest. Shall I ask Jane to play our old duet over?"

"Oh! no more music—no more of that wretched thumping—four hands at once on a grand piano, good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Llewellyn, "you may get up a whist party, if you will, and I'll make one, only don't let me have that weak-minded Mrs. Raxford for a partner—she trumps every-

thing right off, whether she can follow suit or not, it makes no difference. Jane and Mr. Engleton," she added, returning to the old subject, "have been only sitting there a moment—I never saw them together before, that I remember."

"Well, I'll not disturb them. My dear aunt," sinking her voice to a whisper, "I should be very, very glad to see Cousin Jane and Charles Engleton make a match of it—but oh! dear, I don't think that they would ever agree."

"I am sure that *we* need not discuss those probabilities at present, Miss Fyvie," said Aunt Llewellyn with dignity; "my Jane is a good and obedient girl, and I do not see anything antagonistic, as it were, in Mr. Engleton."

"He's one of the best little fellows living," said Hester, "but very excitable over his crotchets, and if you are not excited also, he takes it as an insult. Now, I cannot remember, aunt," said the niece with her fan to her lips in a reflective manner, "when I saw cousin Jane excited last."

Mrs. Llewellyn again glanced at the couple, to whom her attention had been drawn very unnecessarily a short while since. No, certainly not an excitable girl; Jane was sitting bolt upright, a rigid

and stony lay figure—something in the style of that Saxon King effigy, which may be seen anyday in the North Nave of the Crystal Palace—the longest-backed statue in the world.

“I don’t admire girls betraying emotion at every frivolous incident in life,” was the lofty comment to Hester’s last remark.

“But, aunt, a girl may betray a little emotion at the prospect of being married, I hope.”

“Hester,” was the solemn answer, “your sad habit of catching up people’s words and turning them into unseemly jests, grows upon you, and deteriorates from those good qualities which you inherited from *us*. In your father, it is not pleasant at all times—but in you, Hester, it is absolutely terrible.”

“Do I ‘catch up’?” asked Hester, “well, that is unamiable, and I’ll try and break myself of the habit, though it’s my dear old father’s—or it used to be, before he had everything his own way in this world.”

“If he had let me have my own way in this last affair——”

“What affair’s that?”

“There you go again,” cried Mrs. Llewellyn,

"that's just what I say. I'm sure it's so great a mercy to be allowed to get through a sentence in this house that one ought be grateful for the privilege. I meant, of course your en——"

"Aunt, I wouldn't speak of that again, please. It is unnecessary—really it is."

"But as one of the family, surely I have a right?"

"No, you haven't," said Hester, tetchily; "there, don't look so scared, aunt," in a softer tone, "but I don't think you have, now it's all settled, and I love *him*—though I don't tell him so, for fear of making him conceited—as I love no one else, not even myself."

"Good gracious!—how immodest!"

"And I fight his battles with all the Fyvie sharpness, and with all the Fyvie *pluck*."

Away started Hester from her aunt's side, after this inelegant and unladylike peroration, leaving Mrs. Llewellyn gasping for breath. When she had recovered from her astonishment, she exclaimed,

"I never did like that rude girl—never."

"What girl's that, Charlotte?" inquired Mrs. Fyvie in her ear, that languid lady having found strength to cross the room to her sister.

"Dear me, Hester, how you startle one!" said Mrs. Llewellyn, peevishly; "why, Miss Bonnyrook, to be sure—we were talking of her just now, Hester and I. You remember Miss B.—she was governess here once."

"Poor thing, yes—I didn't notice any rudeness in her manners."

"But I did, Hester."

That being conclusive, the subject was dropped; and Mrs. Fyvie feeling rather faint, and wishing that she had not taken the trouble to cross the room, sat and sniffed at her smelling-salts.

"I asked Hester to make up a rubber at whist," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "but she has forgotten my request—her head's full of nonsense just now."

"Dear Hester!" murmured Mrs. Fyvie; "if ever a girl deserved to be happy, Charlotte, it is she."

"Ah! yes—very likely. There's Mr. Engleton off."

"Off!—off where?"

"My dear woman, how should I know?"

Mr. Engleton looking suddenly up from his corner, had seen for the first time that Mr. Raxford was no longer absorbed by the fascinations

of Miss Fyvie. He sprang to his feet with a half apology for curtailing his own story, to which Miss Llewellyn had been listening, and the instant afterwards was at Laurence's side.

"My dear fellow, I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, producing a handful of papers from his pocket; "but I had become a little disturbed over my pet grievance—the social condition of the masses, and failed to notice that Miss Fyvie had left you. Here are all the calculations that I have made."

"Oh! indeed," said Laurence, drily; "if you'll pass them over, I'll run through them in my own room."

"You're very kind—thank you," said Mr. Engleton, after pausing for an instant to consider that new proposition; "I knew you were a fellow that did not mind a little trouble for a good cause. And this is a good cause—a something that wants looking into."

"What is that which requires looking into, in Devonshire, Engleton?" asked Mr. Fyvie, senior, from the opposite side of the room, where the loud tones of James Engleton's voice had reached him; "is it a secret?"

"On the contrary—it requires your co-operation, sir—the co-operation of the best men in the place."

"What does?"

"Drains, sir."

"The nasty man!" ejaculated one of the dowagers before alluded to; "what an excessively filthy subject, to be sure!"

"I consider, Mr. Fyvie," cried James Engleton, leaning towards his host, with both hands extended, and full of papers, "that the drainage of the whole place is defective, and that in the village near your mine, there is not even an apology for a drain amongst—let me see, how many houses?—I have it here somewhere."

"Yes, yes—exactly—I see," said Mr. Fyvie, seeing also that he had mounted Mr. Engleton on a very odd hobby for a drawing-room assembly; "we'll look into that matter to-morrow."

"And as for a good, practicable sewer——"

"Ah! we'll look into that too—or I'll get somebody to look for me, as the prospect is not very inviting. Will you have any tea, Engleton, here are the cups coming round?"

"Thank you—in due course, sir. And as for

the village itself—which I have studied now for two months incessantly, and at which I may say I have worked night and day—for I want to get my book out on ‘The Masses,’ by the autumn—why, sir, it’s a sink of abomination.”

“Drains—sewers—sinks!” murmured Mr. Llewellyn, still on the hearth-rug, with his hands behind him; “to think that a man of good family should be putting his nose into things of that description! It’s very odd.”

“His nose, or the idea of the thing?” inquired a facetious guest near him.

Mr. Llewellyn never allowed liberties of this description.

“The idea, sir, *is* odd,” he said fiercely.

“It’s the cleanest village in Devonshire,” affirmed Mr. Fyvie, ruffled in the slightest degree at Mr. Engleton’s new charge. He had had a hand in the formation, and had given more than one opinion as to the construction of his miners’ cottages; he was the landlord of half Tavvydale, and therefore he did not like the last remark of Mr. James Engleton, and protested against it.

“And that’s not saying much, you know,” said Engleton, launching himself into this new branch

of an old subject. "I appeal to any one who has seen this Tavvydale village to answer me if it is not an unhealthy, horrid settlement. Two or three thousand people at the bottom of a hill, instead of the top, all crammed into houses like sardines into a box, stewing in their own oil—with no delicacy as to the sleeping accommodation—not a bit of it. I counted myself thirteen persons of one family of the name of Simmons in a two-roomed house, and the head of that family, sir, actually kept pigs, and what is more, my opinion is, that the pigs slept with the children, or were made pillows of by the senior members. Sir, it's a gross abuse—it lowers the masses—and the whole subject requires ventilation."

"Like that last house you visited," said Fyvie laughing; "but I did not know about the pigs. Egad! my dear," turning to his wife with a little dismay, "didn't we buy a pig of Simmons, just to help him with the rent—or some bacon—or something?"

"You want twice as many cottages, Mr. Fyvie," cried Engleton, "three times as many cottages before the work of purification—outwardly and inwardly, morally and physically—can be pro-

ceeded with. And then you require an inspector—that is my idea of the case—to visit house after house.”

“And be kicked out of door after door—exactly.”

“Sir, don’t make a jest of a thing so serious as this,” cried Engleton, now very warm and energetic, “you should think of these classes—working classes—herding together like brutes almost.”

“But, bless me, sir!” exclaimed Fyvie with a stamp of his foot, “it’s as moral a village as any in England. No drinking, except water-drinking—no swearing—never heard a bad word in my life there. The whole thing is an absurd exaggeration, Mr. Engleton, and you are wasting valuable time over a foolish theory. Very creditable to you to take all this trouble, but it can’t possibly answer.”

“I’ll keep on at it for all that.”

“Nothing like perseverance,” said Mr. Fyvie; “and by the way, about those new refuges—on that excellent principle of soup and psalm-singing alternately—you carried *that* out, I suppose, last year?”

Mr. Engleton looked somewhat crestfallen at this.

"It was certainly tried, Mr. Fyvie," he said spasmodically; "my idea was, ladies and gentlemen," he added, perceiving that he was the centre of attraction at that moment, "that the waifs and strays of great cities might be taught to sing an evening hymn or so after supper—softening imperceptibly thus, and acquiring here and there a taste for music that might be of use to them in after life."

"Howling about the streets all the blackguard melodies in fashion," said Mr. Fyvie.

"I was speaking of hymns—teaching these poor creatures *hymns*, sir," said Engleton very severely, "not secular melodies, blackguard or otherwise. Well, sir—after supper——"

"I should have made it—No song, no supper," observed the gentleman whose first facetious remark had been quenched by Mr. Llewellyn.

"Sir, I have no doubt you would have managed things a great deal more cleverly," retorted Engleton, who was inclined to lose his temper—good-tempered fellow as he was naturally—beneath all this polite badgering; "but hungry and cold people are not inclined to sing hymns after a day's tramp, as a rule."

"Well?" said Fyvie interrogatively.

"I have nothing more to say, sir," replied Mr. Engleton; "we will dismiss the subject, if you please."

And Mr. Engleton folded his arms one over the other, and surveyed the carpet stolidly.

"But, Mr. Engleton," said Hester, "you have not told us why these poor people did not sing after supper, out of very gratitude?"

Mr. Engleton still remained silent, until Laurence reminded him that a lady was addressing him.

"It's a very uninteresting subject, Miss Fyvie—not worth mentioning again, but—if you wish it—if anybody really wishes it——"

"Certainly we all wish it," said Mr. Fyvie, "we are all anxious for the sequel."

"Oh! very good, then," remarked Charles Engleton. "They would not sing out of gratitude, at all events. A few tried to sing—but the rest complained of the soup having inflated them too much for musical purposes."

This was too great a trial for the gravity of the masculine portion of the community, and a roar of laughter, that disturbed the sensitive nerves of

Mr. Engleton, woke up the echoes of Tavvydale House. The narrator glanced round very fiercely at his tormentors, and then burst forth into a hearty laugh himself.

"Well, it was ridiculous," he assented; "I didn't see it in that light before. Laugh away, gentlemen, it's a very good joke after all. After that failure, I left the refuges to people better versed in such things."

"Just as I would leave the cottage question," said Mr. Fyvie, "for everybody's very comfortable, Engleton, I can assure you."

"I shall go in for statistics, and make every inquiry, at all events," said Mr. Engleton. "Why, there's only one decent little cottage within twenty miles of this house."

"Indeed! whose cottage is that?" asked Mr. Fyvie.

"I know," cried Hester, "Milly's cottage."

"It's a cottage in Wind-Whistle Cleft," explained Mr. Charles Engleton. "A pretty little place, perched half-way up the slope of the hill, with a background of rock and ivy. The cleanest place, too, as well as the prettiest—just big enough for one. Now, why can't cottages be

built apart from each other, like this; nice one-roomed cottages for single young people of either sex?"

"It is not well for man to live alone," quoted Mr. Fyvie.

"She's happy enough, I know. In such a spot she must be happy."

"Oh! you have seen her, then?" said Fyvie.

"Certainly I have seen her. I have been sketching the cottage, and its proprietress comes home from work sometimes whilst I am studying the artistic."

"Take care," said Hester, laughing, "Milly's very pretty."

"Really! I have not noticed that," said Engleton, earnestly.

"And you an artist, and a young man!" cried Fyvie. "Ah! it may be true!"

"I have but seen her at a distance," explained Engleton; "she is very shy, and makes a long circuit to avoid me. And there again is a proof of the modesty which—which——"

"Which follows isolation," concluded Mr. Fyvie. "Not exactly a proof, for Milly has lived in the village, and was just as modest there. Her father

built that cottage, with my permission ; he was a miner, and as honest a fellow as ever breathed. When he was killed in my service, poor fellow, I gave Milly the cottage for life, rent free. And she clings to the place like a young hermit, and at the mines or at home she always seems as happy as the day is long, the jade. We all like Milly Athorpe."

"Athorpe?" said Laurence.

"A niece of the man who dined with us to-day, Laurence. Captain Athorpe rose in life, and his brother did not."

"Why don't she live with her uncle?" asked Mr. Llewellyn, suddenly intruding upon the conversation.

"Well, he hasn't asked her, perhaps, or she's too independent—I don't know ; do you, Hester?"

"Oh ! yes."

But Hester did not condescend to explain the reasons for Milly's solitude, on the contrary, turned the conversation, which became less general. Half an hour afterwards, when Laurence had pocketed all Mr. Engleton's papers, the head of Jonathan Fyvie Junior suddenly peered round the drawing-room door.

"Oh! here you are at last," exclaimed his father; "come in. Where have you been?"

"To Colonel Jarvis's—we've had a long ride. I'm very tired—good night."

And before his good night could be responded to, the head had disappeared.

Later in the night still, when Laurence had gone up to his room, after a whispered injunction from his mother to leave his door open for a little while, as she must come and congratulate him more heartily before she went to sleep that night, he found Jonathan Fyvie the younger, sitting before his empty fire-grate, complacently smoking a cigar.

"What, Jonathan!" he exclaimed.

"Ah! shut the door, old fellow. I have been waiting here no end of time for you."

CHAPTER IV.

CONGRATULATIONS.

LAURENCE RAXFORD, thus adjured, closed the door behind him, opened the window to allow the egress of a little of the tobacco smoke, drew a chair towards his friend, and sat down facing him.

"Light up, old fellow," suggested Jonathan, whose father we shall hereafter term Mr. Fyvie, for the sake of distinction, "and then we shall be on an equality."

"I did not think of smoking to-night—I have an insufferable headache."

"This will soothe you."

He tendered an elaborately-worked cigar-case to Laurence, who opened it, and took therefrom his Havannah. Presently both young men were doing their best to render the atmosphere of that spacious sleeping-chamber as poisonous as possible.

"I thought I would not go to my room, Laurence, without offering you *my* congratulations on becoming a partner in the old mine—without seeking an opportunity for a quiet chat with you about the future."

"You are very kind, Jonathan."

"Most men in my position would have grumbled a little with the senior partner at the introduction of a third to the concern ; but I knew the mine could afford it, and I never was, you know, a selfish fellow."

"No," assented Laurence, who, however, knew but little concerning him.

"Your father and mine were old friends and old partners together before we were born, so the matter was square enough. I did not enter into the story—it's not my way to worry myself concerning details—there was a promise and all that, no doubt."

"No promise, Jonathan. I am indebted to my position entirely to your father's generosity."

"Ah ! it doesn't matter—here you are a partner, at all events, and I congratulate you. I think that I have cause to rejoice, for you're a good-tempered fellow, full of energy, and just the man to look

after everybody—which I never was. Candidly, I am not partial to supervision of subordinates, supervision of accounts—or anything in that line. Give me my share of profits, and let me rest, that is all; there are sure to be heaps of profits, and, as junior partner, you will see that they're not frittered away in working expenses. You take a load off my mind, Laurence, and I'm content."

He lay back in the capacious arm-chair that he had selected for himself before our hero's entrance, crossed one leg over the other, and puffed complacently at his cigar. Laurence looked at his handsome, sleepy face, and read at once that no fair share of work would be borne on the shoulders of Jonathan Fyvie, junior. Just enough, no doubt, implying every confidence in him, and therefore indirectly flattering him, but still objectionable in a way that Laurence could not explain, even to himself.

"I'll work for the two of us with all my heart," he said at last, almost by way of reproof to that sense of opposition which had instinctively crept into his thoughts.

"Oh! I know that—we all know that," asserted

Jonathan ; "you bring harmony into the council, and there was a split in the cabinet—a little one—before you turned up. My father don't care for work now any more than I do, and has been worrying me the last six months about my neglect of the mine, as if there were any necessity for crawling over there four or five times a week, when everything was going on well without me. If things had not been going on well, that would have been a very different affair, of course. Then I—I should have looked into it at once, no doubt."

"It seems necessary to me that the principals should visit the mines very frequently," said Laurence.

"They're all honest people there ; and if they're not, I can't help it," said Jonathan ; "if they had been robbing us by wholesale, I should have never found them out, so what was the good of my going there ? Have another cigar ?"

"No, thank you," said Laurence, "I am not half through this one."

"You don't mind me keeping you up ?"

"Pray don't mention it."

"Then I'll light up again. What do you think of these weeds, Raxford ?"

Raxford thought that they were very good ones.

"I should think they were," he cried, with an energy that was strangely at variance with his previous indolence, "they cost me ninepence a piece, first hand, and I bought a hundred pounds weight of them. The only weeds worth fighting after, and I was determined no one else should have them. They cost me two journeys to Liverpool, but—ha! ha!—I secured them at last."

"They're very good cigars," repeated Raxford, for the want of anything else to say at this juncture.

"I'm glad you like them. I'll send over half a dozen pounds in the morning to that queer crib of yours at the mines. You'll find them serviceable in the evenings."

Laurence Raxford would have entered a protest at this, had not Jonathan interrupted him.

"They'll be too dry before I get through them, so it's quite a favour to accept this little present from me. They will be capital companions for you—the only ones you'll get at Wheal Desperation, unless you try a little flirtation with the mining girls."

Jonathan Fyvie laughed very heartily at this—

it was his own joke, and therefore to be patronized.

Laurence shook his head.

"I don't think that I shall adopt that latter suggestion, Jonathan."

"I'm hanged if there are not some of the prettiest girls in Devonshire amongst them," Laurence," his partner affirmed. "Of course they're ignorant, and clumsy, and shy, and mutton-fisted many of them; but it's astonishing how a little attention turns their heads, and draws them out. Astonishing!"

Jonathan had tilted back his chair, and was looking up at the ceiling, or he would have noticed a sudden contraction of Laurence Raxford's brow. It disappeared as rapidly as it had presented itself, however, and Laurence said,

"Ah! you are jesting; it is neither my habit nor yours, I am sure, to experimentalize on the vanities of these country wenches. What do you think your sister will say to you, for recommending me this odd indulgence for my leisure?"

"You don't tell my sister everything, Laurence," he replied, with a meaning shake of the head. "I am a man of the world, and understand human nature. And I know that you—shut up in that

.

odd box amongst the Dartmoor Hills—will not die of the horrors if you can help it. And if I find you out, Laurence—and upon my soul I have my suspicions of this extraordinary energy of yours—why, I'll—I'll say nothing at head-quarters."

"You are welcome to say anything you please," said Laurence, trying very hard to change the conversation; "and I hope that you will find me out now and then there, and help me on with my studies, and show me the right tracks over the ground."

"How long do you mean to stick there?" asked Jonathan.

"Until I am married."

"It will be a long journey to Tavvydale House. I presume your studies will not interfere with your courting in this direction."

"No, I hope not."

"You can have a look at Wind-Whistle Cleft by the way; there's some pretty scenery about there."

Laurence anticipated another allusion to a pretty girl—to the Milly whose name had been already mentioned twice that day; but the locality indicated did not appear to suggest one of its in-

habitants. Jonathan smoked on very placidly after this, until Laurence said,

"We have been speaking of Wind-Whistle Cleft this evening."

"Have you?" said he quickly. "Who has?"

"Mr. Engleton."

"Ah! what a bore that fellow is; he's always hanging about that Cleft, I hear—sketching Milly's cottage, isn't he?"

"Yes, he told us so."

"He's a sly humbug—after Milly himself, I'll wager. Whenever I hear a man preaching about the elevation of the working classes, or the reformation of this and that abuse, I write him down a humbug."

"You must make a few mistakes in your judgment at times, Jonathan."

"And Milly, I daresay, encourages him—looks out of the corners of those big eyes of hers, I'll lay twenty pounds."

"Why, I hear a capital account of this girl."

"Oh! she's a favourite of the family—a pensioner, and devil knows what—and that makes her proud and stand-offish from her own class. Then

her uncle looks after her like an ogre, and her aunt attends to her morals, and her religious duties—but for all that, my opinion of Milly is that she is as vain, as sly, and as much of a woman, as any girl in Devon.”

“I am afraid that you have formed a very poor estimate of the sex, Fyvie.”

“I have formed a correct one,” was the conceited answer, “I don’t believe in the virtues of either sex—we’re all alike—I don’t believe in you.”

Laurence laughed with him at this naive assertion—they were still laughing when Mrs. Raxford opened the door softly, entered, and then went back a step gasping and coughing.

“Oh! dear, the smoke!” she cried, “oh! I beg pardon, Mr. Jonathan, I was not aware that you were keeping my Laurence company.”

“Just for a few minutes,” said Jonathan rising, “to congratulate him, and all that kind of thing. Pray, don’t let me send you away.”

Jonathan bade good night to his partner and departed. Laurence’s mother took the seat which the late visitor had vacated.

“How long has Mr. Jonathan been with you, Laurence?” asked Mrs. Raxford.

"I found him in possession of this room when I arrived."

"Do you like him, dear?" asked the mother anxiously.

"He's an odd fish," was the evasive answer; "I can't make him out exactly."

"He always appears to me a quiet—I may say an extremely quiet young man in company. Has he—has he much to say to you? He was laughing very heartily when I came in."

"He launched out a little to-night, mother," answered Laurence, "and astonished me with his facetious side."

"A very good-tempered young man—don't you think so?"

"Probably—very good-tempered."

"And gentlemanly—extremely gentlemanly."

"Y—es," was the evasive answer.

"Laurence, dear," said the mother anxiously, "don't you—oh! I'm afraid you don't—like young Mr. Fyvie? May I ask you in confidence?"

Laurence laughed at his mother's solicitude.

"My dear mother, I can only repeat my former statement—I can't make him out exactly. He's a riddle to me, and I was never fond of riddles. I

shall solve him in due course, *sans doute*. Whether I admire him or not in the future, we shall agree together, for I quarrel with no man."

"Yes," said the mother, "of course you will agree with him. And now, my dear boy, let me congratulate you with all my heart ; I haven't had an opportunity before to say how happy—really and truly happy I am !"

The good mother left her chair to take the manly face between her hands, and kiss it long and tenderly, and with motherly love. He was an only child, and, though she had disguised her feelings well, she had been anxious concerning his future—even till the eleventh hour—despite Mr. Fyvie's promises. For she was a nervous woman, who had met with many bitter disappointments.

"And to think that it is all finished, and that you will be a rich man."

"Without working honestly towards riches, in the first place," replied Laurence. "Ah! how a man must value himself and his position, if every step upwards has been hewn by his own hands."

"Why, Laurence—not dissatisfied?"

"No—it would be ungrateful to grumble,"

replied Laurence ; "everybody has been very kind and generous to me, and I have met with more than my deserts. But——"

"But!" repeated Mrs. Raxford, wondering.

"But it has all been knocked up in so great a hurry," he said, hurriedly himself ; "that I am dazed, as it were. I have not settled down yet—I do not realize all the blushing honours that have been heaped upon my head. I am a lucky fellow—I know that. I should be very happy, mother, I feel that, but——"

"But, again!" exclaimed Mrs. Raxford ; "my dear Laurence, what *is* the matter with you to-day?"

"Heaven knows!" answered Laurence, almost sadly ; "I feel that I have done my best to be grateful, to please everyone, but I have scarcely been a free agent in all this. I *was* very grateful for the lift—for Mr. Fyvie's generosity. I even took his hint, and yours, concerning your mutual wishes, and proposed to Hester."

"Laurence, Laurence, but you loved her. You have never been so——"

"So great a brute as not to love her!" concluded Laurence ; "I hope not so bad as that. I should

have preferred a longer courtship, less impulse in the proposal, and more steady consideration of my heart and hers—how do I know that she loves *me*?”

“You may be sure of that.”

“She’s a dear, amiable girl, and I am very much in love with her now, naturally. There, hurry or no hurry, everything is over—I am a partner in Wheal Desperation—I am engaged to Hester Fyvie, and all before me, around me, far ahead of me, is bright with sunshine, mother.”

“Thank God for it!” cried the more grateful woman.

“Amen !” echoed Laurence Raxford.

Then followed fresh congratulations, and Mrs. Raxford composed herself for a “long talk,” crying with very joy over Laurence’s future. Laurence introduced no further “buts” into his discourse ; he was light-hearted and joyous, as befitted his position ; and when his mother left him, there was not the shadow of a cloud to mar her rejoicing. She was going away to-morrow—going to London to look after her little house-property, and to arrange a plan for disposing of the same when the marriage-day was fixed between

Miss Fyvie and her son. After that, to come to Devonshire, and settle near those two who were to take each other for better for worse, and live happily ever afterwards. Hester Fyvie was dear to her already as a daughter—Hester had fallen easily and naturally in love with “her boy,” and that was a compliment to the mother as well as to the son.

“You will see me to the station to-morrow, Laurence?—and you will write to me every post when I get back to town?”

“Every time I have news to communicate, at any rate.”

“I shall think something has happened if you don’t write.”

“I’ll write twice a week.”

“There’s a dear lad,” said Mrs. Raxford; “and let them be nice long letters, telling me how you prosper. And you’ll mind and not go too near the machinery—those fly-away wheels have people’s heads off before there’s time to get them out of the way. Good night, Laurence.”

“Good night.”

She came back again, to whisper that she was *so* happy, and then fluttered out of the room, leaving

Laurence in sole possession of his bachelor chamber at last. When he was sure that she was gone, he locked himself in for the night, took off his dress-coat, and then changed his position for a seat by the open window, looking out across the country, bright with the moonlight, and shadowed but in the distance by the sullen range of the Dartmoors. He found that his cigar had gone out, when he was sitting alone there. He half rose, as if with the intention of re-lighting it; then he abandoned that idea, and let Jonathan Fyvie's favourite brand drop from his fingers into the garden below. Finally, he crossed his arms upon his chest, bravo fashion, and went off into that vague, misty, speculative dream-land, wherein his eyes were open, and he was conscious of sitting there, staring at the moonlit scene ahead of him.

He gave way to no soliloquy, such as had disturbed Mr. Fyvie's after-dinner nap—such as a reader has a right to expect from a hero in a thoughtful mood, sitting at an open window gazing at the moon. On the contrary, he compressed his lips together, as though he was frightened lest a secret should escape him, or a terrible doubt or two find voice to betray him. His face assumed

a graver, sadder expression ; it was not like the face of a man who had had his fortune made for him, and who had been lucky in his loves. It was the same perplexed face which Hester Fyvie had noticed once before that day. We can only speculate as to the train of thought which kept the young man so long at the open window, and gave a tinge—just a tinge—of dissatisfaction to his looks. Whether we are right or wrong in our surmises, we must leave to after-chapters of the story to decide.

Was he still thinking of the haste with which everything had been concluded—his partnership in Wheal Desperation—his engagement to its proprietor's daughter ? Had both been thrown a little too persistently in his way, and had he been too full of gratitude, and not full enough of that circumspection which his prior training had warranted ?

Or was he thinking more of the future than the past ?—of the life at the mines—the life that he was sure that he should like, that he had sought, in the first instance, without dreaming of a partnership ; of the partners, father and son, with whom he was allied ; of Fyvie, junior, in particular, with

his free-and-easy notions, his lax principles, his carelessness and his good-humour? Or of the wife that would be his, and the task that would be ever before him to make her as happy as she deserved?

Before he left for Devonshire, he had pictured to himself somewhat of an uphill life, and felt all the brighter and the stronger for the prospect. He had told his mother, with a swelling heart, how he would work his way upwards, fearing no barriers in his way; and had wondered, without suspecting anything, at the strange smile with which his mother had responded to his eloquence. She had known Mr. Fyvie's secret all along, and had kept it in an unwomanly spirit, bursting, as she had been, with the intention for years. So it had all come suddenly on Laurence Raxford, and, from the first intimation of Mr. Fyvie's wishes, he had been confused and unlike himself.

He had said strange things, and done strange things; he had been very grateful, and he considered himself a very lucky fellow. Half a dozen times a day he told himself *that*, as well as his friends, but it was a thoughtful, almost a gloomy face that looked from the window at the night.

One more supposition, and then the curtain shall be rung up on our story-proper. Had Jonathan Fyvie's cigar been too much for Laurence Raxford ?

CHAPTER V.

WIND-WHISTLE CLEFT.

LAURENCE RAXFORD went fairly at the working partnership on the following day. Long before luncheon at Tavvydale House he had seen his mother to the railway station, received her manifold injunctions and blessings, started her off to London, returned in Mr. Fyvie's carriage to Mr. Fyvie's mansion, wished good-bye to all friends—and enemies, if he had any—took a more tender adieu of Hester in the garden, promising everything that was necessary and proper in a favoured suitor—to write regularly when business was brisk, and to stroll very frequently to Tavvydale House when his services were not required at the mines—and then he had settled down to thoughts of Wheel Desperation.

If he were thoughtful still—as he was being driven in a light gig to the old battle-ground of

the Fyvies, the new battle-ground for him from that day—his reveries were not of yesternight, or at least they gave a more pleasant expression to his countenance. In the bright sunshine, he could once more exult at his good fortune, and promise himself that he would deserve it, if ever energy and perseverance deserved good fortune yet.

He had even said to Hester, in an interval of eloquent and fervid leave-taking,

“You must not blame me, Hester, if I have my business on my mind too much—for a while, even if Wheal Desperation be almost first in my thoughts. I am going to work in earnest!”

“That is what papa wishes, too. No, I shall not blame you; and if I be now and then just a trifle jealous of this mine, you shall never know it, Laurence.”

“Ah! but I would rather know that—you shall not keep even one little grievance to yourself, if I can help it.”

“Which you cannot,” she said, laughing; “I shall be very secretive over my wrongs, and until they master me, you shall not take your share, Laurence.”

These words, and the loving look with which

they were accompanied, to keep him company on the long road towards the mine, and then before one o'clock of the day at work in earnest.

Laurence was a man who wished to know his ground, and to take his place upon it as speedily as possible. One fault of our hero's might be that what he desired to do earnestly he did at times too hurriedly—darting at his task, or his desire, with a precipitancy that once or twice in life he was sorry for afterwards. But he was anxious to be of service in his new estate, to test the many theories which long-study had engendered—to understand practically, and at any sacrifice, the whole art of wrenching money from mother Earth.

An hour after his appearance on his property he was many fathoms below the surface, in a miner's dress, and with a candle in his cap. Before work ceased that day, he had astonished a few of the hands by his superfluous energy. Possibly a few had shrugged their shoulders, and laughed quietly to themselves. Energetic young men from the School of Mines had turned up before at Wheal Desperation, taking their share of work, and earning, with no small labour, their experience; but they had tamed down wonderfully after the first

week, and taken the affairs of mining life with great composure. It would be the same with the junior partner, no doubt. But at the end of the week, it was not exactly the same with him. He was working, if anything, harder than ever. His theories had gone wrong, or he had gone too quickly at them; the mining captains, as Mr. Fyvie had prophesied, had listened to the ideas based on his book knowledge, the lectures he had heard, and the experiments he had witnessed, but they had not helped him much, and Captain Athorpe had objected to be put too much out of his way, and at last to be interfered with, so far as the men under him in his own particular level were concerned. Laurence, considering that he had lost time, did his best to make up for it, and succeeded, as he deserved. At the expiration of one clear week he knew his mine, at least, every inch of ground therein, and half the faces of the men and women in his employ. He began to hope that *he* was beginning to be appreciated too, for he had exerted himself to win everybody's esteem; he was naturally kind in his way, and free with his good words, and with those bright smiles, which go so far to win the hearts of subordinates,

He was like a clever and genial schoolmaster, ruling well, and exacting discipline and obedience, but winning, also, respect and affection unto himself—a conquest which many men miss all their lives, and wonder how it happens so.

Laurence took an interest in his workpeople as well as in their work, and they were simple-minded, honest folk, with whom a good word went a long way. In time he should know every man and woman there by name and sight; he should not feel thoroughly at home till he was acquainted with all this large family. He knew the mine well now; he should know everybody on it presently.

There were larger mines in the vicinity than Wheal Desperation, but few richer, and none more busy for its size. It was a mine worked solely by water power—therefore, a little old-fashioned and cumbrous in its machinery, here and there. The river flowing on through the Dartmoor country had been seized in its progress, twisted from its course, bent to the purpose of crafty men, made to run in divers intricate channels, to serve as shafts, to wash the metal from the dross, and to turn wheels of monstrous size, that had

cost their owners many thousands of pounds, and were like wheels of another age, when Titans lived ; to cross and recross itself, running in many grooves—a net-work of water, black and dense at last with its metallic surcharges ; and after doing all the service in its power, and all the dirty work, dismissed, slave-like, to force its way, as best it could, towards a purer life. It found it in the sea, seventeen or eighteen miles away—scarcely before, for Tavistock folk grumbled at their poisoned fish, and the rocky banks of the river five miles hence glittered with specks of copper ore.

Wandering now and then above ground, where the Tavvy did good service for the mining folk, Laurence, full of interest in his pursuit, was content enough. So far as peace and rest constitute happiness, he looks back still at this first week of his life in earnest, and fancies it was one of the happiest weeks of his existence ; for it was free from storms, and he was content with himself, his present, and his future. Women and children, to the number of three hundred, perhaps, worked above the surface till six in the evening, and Laurence, watching them at times, wondered, with a listless wonderment, born of an oft-repeated

name, which was Milly Athorpe amongst that number there. He did not ask the question, for he was not curious enough, and he knew that in good time she would cross his path with the rest.

There were many pretty faces bent shyly away from him as he took stock of his servants; any of them might belong to Milly, who was a pretty girl, he had heard. But they were faces all of one pattern, he thought, and all of one expression, for what he could see to the contrary; rosy faces, most of them, buried in extraordinary limp bonnets, or head gears of a bonnet-like construction, that hung far over the head, and flapped about with every movement of their owners. Women at unfeminine vocations enough, as is customary in mining districts, and where labour is cheap; women in circles, with a centre of copper ore—ore in the rough—at which they pounded incessantly with long, heavy hammers; women pushing truck-loads of ore from the mouth of the shaft to these centres; from these centres to others, where the ore was finer, and fit for washing, or for sending off presently to capitalists, who had bought largely of the precious stuff, and would deal with it as it suited them, and the markets; women under long open

sheds, doing their metallic washings cheerfully; women everywhere, a few overlooking the others in some departments, but the majority overlooked by the Captain Peters with whom we dined in our first chapter; women in short blue skirts, and thick boots, and with mufflers and leathern gloves round those mutton-fists to which Jonathan Fyvie had alluded, and of which fists most of them were careful. Amongst these specimens of the softer sex a sprinkling of children, and a few old and feeble men, who had done their best in life, and were of no more use than children in the mines, and had but children's wages; whole generations of one family here working from the first to the last in the interests of Fyvie, Fyvie, and Raxford.

A bustling scene till sundown, and then a stillness over everything, that was almost depressing; the miners away in their village, a mile distant from the property; the clerk, Waters—an old bachelor, with old bachelor-like habits of going to bed in his room over the clerk's office, at 8 P.M. precisely—left in possession of Wheal Desperation, with Laurence and a deaf old woman officiating as house-keeper, cook, and general maid-of-all-work.

Laurence's room was on the upper floor of this office, a long, low-ceilinged room, tolerably furnished, with windows looking back and front, and sideways over the property, and draped with heavy moreen curtains, that gave an air of "stuffiness" to the chamber. This had been Mr. Fyvie's room in the old times when he lived upon his estate, and was a very desperate man. There was a great F scored on the wooden mantel-shelf, thirty years old, at least, and it appeared to have been done by a very savage gash or two, when the mind of the carver was beset by strange thoughts. This room was "the queer crib" that Jonathan Fyvie had laughed at a week since, and in this room it was the wont of the new partner to rest after the fatigues of the day, to write his letters to his mother and Hester, to dive into accounts, and pore over the books—matters which he wished to understand as thoroughly as the mining business—occasionally to smoke one of his friend's favourite cigars, half-a-dozen pounds of which had been sent, according to promise, and in all faith and friendship, by special messenger from Tavvydale House.

In this room, then, exactly a week after his

appearance as a partner there, Laurence was sitting, staring at the blackness of the night, and speculating as to whether it would be fine enough to-morrow to dine at Mr. Fyvie's, and go courting for the first time since he had entered energetically upon his duties at the Wheal. He had been for a stroll along the broad road that crosses the moor, and had been glad to get back again, the wind being sharp and cold, and inclined to be boisterous with any one in reach that evening. On his return he had looked at the account-books for a few minutes, along with Mr. Waters, stayed also for a few minutes' chat with the old gentleman, who was one more who had taken a fancy to Laurence, and then at the respectable hour of 9 P.M. he was considering the expediency of turning into his large four-poster for the night. He was the last person up in the house; the old woman was snoring in the distance somewhere, and Mr. Waters, in the room to the left, had been fast asleep one clear hour by the eight-day clock.

Laurence was falling easily into the new habit of retiring early to bed; he had been a student in his day, wasting midnight oil over his researches, and latterly, at Tavvydale House, keep-

ing late hours there, for fashion's sake; but he dropped readily enough into his new habit—accepting it as a phase in his new life, and feeling the better for it already. He liked his life, for he was gaining knowledge in it, and he did not give himself much time to think of the monotony of after-business hours, with only old Waters for company. He was content, and he felt that a visit to Tavvydale House, and the enjoyment of Hester's company, was to be indulged in with more zest, looked forward to, and back at, with more pleasure, for duty keeping him six days out of seven apart from society. He was content, then, with his position; nay, he must have been happy, we reiterate, for he was singing away in his room, not too loudly,—lest he should intrude on Mr. Water's slumbers,—and not with much soul in his music, for, as already intimated, he was speculating if it would be fine enough for a long walk tomorrow afternoon.

His whistling, and his speculation in one direction, were suddenly brought to a full stop by a handful of small stones rattling with sharp precision against the glass.

“Hollo!” said Laurence, startled in spite of him-

self. "Here's a visitor, for a change, and Jonathan Fyvie—for a sixpence."

Laurence opened the window, and looked out, drawing his head precipitately back again, as a second shower quitted the hand of the person below.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said a strange voice beneath the window. "I was in a hurry, and afraid that I had not made you hear. No damage, I hope?"

"Not much," answered Laurence, as the last handful of missiles spread themselves over the carpet of his room. "You've made a nice mess in here, that's all. Why didn't you come round to the door and knock, if you wanted anything?"

"I thought I might alarm the house; and seeing your light, I took the liberty of arresting your attention," piped the shrill voice below; "but I sincerely hope that I haven't inconvenienced you in any way?"

"All right," said Laurence; "no occasion to apologize, as there's no glass to pay for. May I ask what you want on the premises?"

"I fear I am trespassing," said the polite individual below; "but the fact is, I've been stupid

enough to lose myself. I've passed this place once before to-night. This is the Wheal Desperation, young man, I think?"

"Yes, sir. Where do you want to go?"

"I want to find Wind-Whistle Cleft. I thought I knew every step of the way—I ought to have done so by this time—but the night is terribly dark, and, in trying to make a short cut by the bridge, I lost myself, and got round here again somehow. Perhaps, if it's not inconvenient, you'll come down, and put me in the right way. I can't be walking about here all night, you know," he concluded somewhat tetchily. "I shall meet with an accident before I have finished."

Laurence leaned further out of window, to inspect the intruder, who had thus coolly asked his services. He could make out but dimly the figure of a man, evidently of short stature, and with a hat on the back of his head—a man with long white hair, he fancied, as he strained his eyes into the darkness. Laurence was considering the stranger's invitation, as he looked down, when the shrill voice said again,

"Of course, you needn't come if you don't like—I wouldn't press you for the world, against any

inclination you may have to the contrary. But you are a young man, and I am an old one; and if you have been taught to honour grey hairs, or entertain any reverence for your seniors, you'll not leave me out here. But if you won't come, why take this."

He stooped so suddenly towards the ground, that Laurence's first idea was, that another handful of stones was coming in his direction; but, to his surprise, a large, and apparently heavy, carpet-bag was held aloft.

"Shall I try and pitch it through the window, sir? I'll call for it in the morning, if you'll wait a moment, and allow me to get my night-shirt out."

"No, no, don't pitch anything more. What a fellow you are for pitching things!" exclaimed Laurence. "You have lost your way, you tell me, and want to find Wind-Whistle Cleft?"

"Precisely so."

"I'll come down, and put you in the way."

"Sir, I am extremely obliged to you."

The old gentleman set down his carpet-bag, and then raised his hat politely, putting it on afterwards still further at the back of his head. Lau-

rence closed the window, went downstairs softly, took the key from the lock—a large key, weighing about a pound and a quarter—and then let himself quietly out of the house, and went round to the back of the premises, where the old gentleman was waiting for him.

“Sir, I am indebted to your courtesy. Will you carry this carpet-bag a little way, or shall I take my turn first?” said the stranger, elevating his hat once more.

“Well,” said Laurence doubtfully, “I think that I will have the first turn at it.”

“You are very kind. Perhaps you will be good enough not to shake it too much, for there’s a bottle of port wine in it, and I daresay the crust is very much disturbed already.”

“I daresay it is.”

Laurence was amused with the coolness, or self-complacency, or whatever it was, of the old man; he was interested in his adventure, and inclined to prosecute it to the end. He looked intently at the stranger, when he was face to face with him; despite the night’s darkness, he could make out that the face was very deeply lined, and the thin mouth shadowed by a

long and heavy white moustache; that the figure of the man was far from robust, and shook a little at the knees; that the dress-coat which he wore was as short for his arms, as the tight-fitting black trousers were for his legs. An old man, with a dash of the scarecrow in him, thought Laurence,—what did he want at Dartmoor at this hour of the night?

“You will excuse me, but is it necessary to go through the Cleft to-night?” asked Laurence.

“Not entirely through it—only to my niece’s cottage there.”

“Is your name Athorpe?”

“My name is Whiteshell—at your service,” and off went the gentleman’s hat again.

“Oh! thank you—I don’t think I shall require your services just at present,” said Laurence, drily; “now, if you are ready, sir, I’ll try and put you in the way.”

“Try and put me in the way!” echoed Mr. Whiteshell; “are you not a native, then?”

“No, I am not.”

“But—bless my soul, sir, you know your way about here, I suppose?”

“I have been a week at the mine—a month or

so in Devonshire. I know Wind-Whistle Cleft by name well enough—by sight, tolerably. I have been twice close upon it, in an evening stroll lately, and I fancy that I can find it in the dark.”

“Yes—I fancied that too, and I haven’t a bit of skin on my knees. I have been tumbling about here an hour—I daresay I have broken that bottle of wine, for the bag has been a terrible nuisance—I think now that we had better turn back and leave it at your place till the morning.”

“I never turn back,” said Laurence, striding on with the bag; “this way, sir. You don’t object to my walking fast?”

“The faster the better, sir—I am an excellent walker,” said Mr. Whiteshell, who had already begun to trot, to keep up with Laurence’s sharp swinging pace.

They walked and ran on in silence together for several minutes. Mr. Whiteshell was the first to break silence, by gasping forth,

“I—I hope that I am not hurrying you too much, sir?”

“Not at all,” said Laurence, in reply; “we will go on faster if you wish it.”

“Not on my account—certainly not, thank

you," answered the dapper man ; "I—I really don't see any pressing occasion for this haste, upon second thoughts now."

"We may have the rain down—it's a good mile to the Cleft."

"We leave the Tavvydale village on our left, I think?" said the traveller.

"Yes."

"Bearing off suddenly by Captain Athorpe's cottage, which used to be, I fancied, at the mouth of the Cleft—keeping guard over my Milly, as I used to say."

"You are then——"

"Miss Athorpe's uncle—on the mother's side. Do you know my niece?"

"I have not the pleasure."

"You are holding some genteel situation at the mines, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very good situations in the office, I daresay, and decent wages, for the country? And you have not seen Milly?"

"I am not certain. There are some hundreds of girls at surface work, and I have been here a week."

"Hum!—I should have fancied that she would have been pointed out to you before this—as beautiful a girl as ever breathed, and, though I say it myself, as good as she is beautiful."

"I have heard her praises sung before. She appears to be a favourite in these parts?"

"She is a favourite, sir. She's a kind of forewoman and overlooker of one of the divisions on the mine—not a common mining girl, you know."

"Indeed."

"A very clever girl, sir—intensely clever, I may say, and quick as lightning. Her mother—my dead sister, sir—was a beautiful and clever woman—she married for love, poor soul, and made a mull of it. She married one of the Athorpes, and by this time you are probably aware what an Athorpe is like?"

"I know Captain Athorpe very well by this time."

"A good man in his way—a pious and upright man, I have no doubt—but no gentility, sir, no evidence of breeding, no respect, in fact, for anybody's opinions but his own. Not generally admired, I fancy?" he added, interrogatively.

Laurence did not venture to express an opinion

upon this, and Mr. Whiteshell continued,

"I only fancy, of course. I have not the pleasure of a very intimate acquaintance with Captain Athorpe, who is rather above his brother's wife's family, and likes to show it. Merely his manner, perhaps, or a little honest pride concerning his worldly possessions, but not pleasant, for all that. The truth is, sir, though I am about the meekest man on the Middlesex side of the water, he and I never agree for five minutes together. In trying to avoid his cottage—to make a *détour*, in fact—I lost my way, and got down a wrong turning, and nearly off a precipice, or something. Shall I take the bag now?"

"I'll go on to the Cleft with it, Mr. Whiteshell."

"Thank you," raising his hat again, "you are exceedingly kind. James Whiteshell is forever indebted to the courtesy of a stranger. Whenever chance leads you to Milk Street, Westminster, sir, I shall be happy to repay the obligation. Across here?"

"Yes, this cuts off Captain Athorpe's cottage, you see."

"Exactly—that white house. They were singing hymns together—he and his wife—an hour

ago. Very praiseworthy employment, although they need not have made such a noise over it. This is the way I came—are you sure that you are going right?”

“Quite sure.”

“It’s very odd. I can’t make out how I managed to lose my way—down here, too? Why, I came down here with a run.”

“At the bottom of this slope we shall find the Cleft, I think.”

“Oh! you only think,” said Mr. Whiteshell ruefully.

The bottom of the hill was reached, and the traveller and his guide were standing at the entrance of a narrow glen or ravine, black as Hades in the dark night, with heavy, full-leaved trees hanging about its entrance, and above the rocks that lowered gaunt and ominous on either side of them.

“There—all this is what I particularly object to in the country,” said Mr. Whiteshell suddenly, “so depressing—such a cut-throat element about these rural back-slums. If it were not for Milly, I’d never set foot out of town—it does me a deal of harm, for I am naturally nervous. Here’s a place

for a murder now, and nobody a bit the wiser till a fellow is as green as grass. Oh! Lord, what's that?"

"That's a rabbit, probably, scouring through the brushwood, more frightened than you are. I presume that you know your way now, Mr. White-shell?"

"You need not presume anything of the kind," he said half-fretfully, "for I can scarcely believe it's the Cleft at all—it has altered very much since I was here last—and the thing they call a path is worse than ever. I hope, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Raxford," said our hero.

"Thank you, Mr. Raxford—that you will not think of leaving a distressed traveller at the beginning of his difficulties. I am very thankful for the trouble you have already taken—but as you *are* out—and not a bit nervous—and used to these kinds of holes—it would be adding materially to the obligation conferred, by accompanying me the rest of the journey. If you be still firm, sir, why, I must bow to your decision, and proceed on my way alone."

Dark as it was, Laurence could see that the old gentleman drew himself up haughtily.

"Come on, sir. I am your cicerone—hang it, if you put it in that light, what can a fellow say? But," he added to himself, "you are an unconscionable old beggar for all that."

Laurence and Mr. Whiteshell went on through the Cleft, following the tortuous curves of a foot-path, or sheep-track, or splash of gravel on the green hill-side, as well as the darkness permitted, occasionally straying from the track, and pausing to consider their whereabouts.

"Well, it certainly is black enough," commented Laurence, "and the trees grow all manner of ways here. This must be a glorious place in the day-time for a pic-nic."

"Or a suicide. Mind your head, sir—you're a little taller than I am, I imagine, and here's a ridiculous tree coming straight out of the rock like the top of a finger post. Yes, I came this way—I remember that tree—I slipped on the other side of the place, and went down there ever so many feet where you hear that miserable gurgling of water. It's a mercy that I wasn't drowned—only came up stunned a bit, and walked all the way back again to Wheal Desperation. Shall I take the bag now?"

"I have just changed hands—all right, sir."

"It's very selfish of me not to press the question, but the fact is, I am feeling my way along with both hands—and you seem used to this scrambling, or have been more accustomed to carry parcels than I. A kind of messenger at the mines, perhaps?"

"No," answered Laurence, who was determined not to assuage the gentleman's curiosity.

"Not a messenger—junior clerk, perhaps? There used to be a junior clerk at the office three years since—Simpson."

"Don't remember him, Mr. Whiteshell."

"Very likely not. He died down here—found all of a heap at the bottom of some hill or other—missed his way in the fog, and came to grief. Where are we now, Mr.—Mr. Raxford?"

"Really, I cannot say. I have never attempted the Cleft before. Is your niece's cottage on the left or on the right?"

"On the left here—half way up the hill where the Cleft widens. We shan't miss it if we look out for a light."

"And we talk less, for talking is a distraction just now. I nearly lost your bag a moment since."

"Good gracious! Keep a still tongue in your

head, then, sir, for the present. What's that?"

"That is the rain coming down. This is an awkward adventure, Mr. Whiteshell."

"Oh, it's a miserable place," groaned that gentleman, tripping at the same time over a mass of bramble which shot out from the bank, and across the path. "I don't think that I will ever come again. It's only my love for the dear girl that brings me here at all. I've no right to come—I'm not in a position to afford it—it is a piece of extravagance which infallibly concludes with the horrors. Where are we now, Mr. Raxford?"

"More in the dark than ever, under these trees. But the cleft widens, I fancy, further on. Steady here, sir—the water below us is evidently deep in this place."

"Then pray walk cautiously. I don't see what is to become of me if you fall over."

"No—you would never get the bag back," was the dry response.

"The rain's coming through the trees now, like a cataract," said Mr. Whiteshell. "How I hate these clefts and valleys, and other nonsense, to be sure! Shall we run for it, Mr. Raxford?"

"Run—where?"

"Well, I don't know. Run into the open, if we can find any, and look out for a light on the left. She said that every night this week, she would put the candle in the window until half-past ten—she winds up her studies punctually at that time."

"Studies—what studies?"

"Oh, all kinds of studies that that stupid fellow Athorpe encourages her in—for the sake of the family, and so on. I don't despise education—I had an education myself, and it has been of use to me—but Milly was quite scholar enough for this place, heaven knows! Where are we likely to be now, Mr. Raxford?"

Mr. Raxford did not reply. He was tired of his adventure, and the heavy rain that was now descending, he considered an unpleasant wind-up thereto.

There was a long journey back to Wheal Desperation, and the prospect even soured his naturally easy temperament. He had not done a wise thing in guiding this gabbling, conceited, selfish old gentleman through the valley; he had been extremely charitable, and received but little thanks for the sacrifice. Let him console himself with

the thought that Mr. Whiteshell would have killed himself in the dark without his assistance.

The cleft was wild and tortuous—the stream below them took strange curves and plunges; and Raxford could imagine that an immense rush of water in old times had torn through the Dartmoor Hills after the fashion of the stream below, and rent this gap in them. In the bright daylight, with the sunshine struggling in amongst the leaves above, making a wealth of fantastic shadowing and colour, this must be a lovely spot, he thought. He would test its beauties in the daylight presently; come here some quiet morning or evening, and slide down to the water's edge, just as huge boulders had slid before him, making islets of themselves in the stream, which split into, rippling falls thereby, for ever after tinkled with sweet music. Raxford was a bit of a poet in his heart—his first dream, his boy's dream, was to make his mark in verse—and discontented as he was just then, and savage with the motive which had brought him forth that night, he could not refrain from a promise to come again in search of beauty here, and to form in this place a dreamland of his own, where he could drop off into his cha-

racteristic "maunderings," with not even a Hester Fyvie to reproach him for his reveries.

"Mr. Raxford, I certainly see a light. It can't be a glow-worm—no glow-worm would be so excessively absurd as to come out this wet night. There, to the right—up the hill."

"Yes—you are right."

"Thank you—I generally am. This way, sir," cried Mr. Whiteshell suddenly adopting the initiative. "It's fine walking up this grass, and no pitfalls for the feet of the inexperienced. This way, sir, if you'll be kind enough to follow me."

Laurence stood amazed for an instant at the sudden development of energy in Mr. Whiteshell. That gentleman, who had plodded wearily behind him for so long, now darted into the front with extraordinary agility, skipped up the hill like a fawn, turned, pirouetted, beckoned to Laurence, took two or three amazing leaps, for no purpose whatever, and was under a thatched porch, rattling away at the latch of the cottage door, a full three minutes before Laurence, weary, and heavy-laden, and anathematizing the old gentleman's frivolity, had toiled up the ascent after him.

By that time the cottage door was opened, a

stream of light had issued thence, casting its bright pathway on the grass, and a girl of eighteen years of age was embracing very heartily the withered form of Mr. Whiteshell.

“My dear Uncle James, you have come, then, at last, to see your Milly!”

“My dear Milly, it’s worth all the danger of the journey to hear your voice, and to find this hearty welcome here. Come along, sir”—turning to his late companion—“as quick as you can with that bag, Mr. Raxford.”

CHAPTER VI.

MILLY.

MR. RAXFORD made all the haste that he could towards the cottage—not out of respect for the adjuration of Mr. Whiteshell, but simply from an anxiety to get out of the rain, descending more fiercely and heavily in this spot of open ground.

Milly looked anxiously towards him as he came into the light.

“Why, it’s—it’s the new master!” she exclaimed; “it’s Mr. Raxford!”

“Yes, it’s part of him,” he replied; “all that the rain has not washed away, at any rate. May I wait up for the shower a little?”

“Certainly, sir. You are—you are very welcome—will you step this way, please?”

Milly was very embarrassed at this sudden appearance of so great a planet in her little sphere;

she ran into the house to set her chairs in order, to whisk several books from the table into an inner room, to look in a half-scared manner round her neatly furnished parlour, for any evidence of disorder which might unintentionally have got there, and then stood, blushing very much, fidgeting with the corners of her apron, and looking down on the red-tiled floor.

Laurence Raxford set the odious carpet-bag in a corner, and looked hard at the girl whose praises he had heard sung more than once lately—the favourite at Tavvydale House—the heroine of the Cleft whose name was to meet him, as he met her on that night, in strange places, and under strange circumstances of life.

Yes, Mr. Fyvie was right. She was, at least in Laurence's estimation, as well as in his senior partner's, the prettiest girl in Devon. It was a face that almost scared him with its beauty, with its expression, which was still more beautiful, which was pure, and full of thought, and yet so womanly. Richly endowed with a face that Murillo might have copied for his angels, Milly stood there as if oppressed by her own beauty—conscious of it, perhaps, but certainly finding it in

the way, and disturbed by the admiration, voluntary and involuntary, of which it was the cause. Will the readers of this book believe Milly—or her biographer speaking for her, with his hand on his heart—when we assure them that her one regret was that she was not a trifle more plain, more common-place, more like the every-day girls in Tavvydale. It was an odd regret; but then Milly was a girl with some odd thoughts of her own, and living alone in the Cleft had helped to foster them more than she was aware. Milly, it may be added here, was a “character;” people said so, beyond the Cleft, and as a character worth, let us hope, a little analysis, she makes her bow upon this stage. A pretty girl, then—or, rather, a beautiful girl, with rich brown hair—some shades darker than Hester Fyvie’s—and with large almond-shaped eyes to match. A lithe figure, full of grace of movement—slight, etherial, and almost childlike, that contrasted strangely with the buxom lasses amongst whom she found herself at Wheel Desperation, or in the chapel on Sundays in the village. Laurence marvelled that he had not been struck with the contrast before; but then she had buried herself in one of those odious limp bon-

nets—half sun-shade and half night-cap—and with her back towards him, she had probably passed for a miner's girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age. He had never met Milly Athorpe face to face before, he felt assured; and he did not wonder now at the heroine—the heroine under protest, so far as she herself was concerned—that she had become within fair range of Wind-Whistle Cleft.

He should have to relate an adventure to-morrow at Tavvydale House, and to add his opinion on Milly Athorpe with the rest. He should tell Hester that this Milly was very beautiful, and that it was fortunate for Hester—that is, if he were of any value in her estimation—that he had never met with a Milly in his own sphere before his late engagement. This would give rise to one of those smart interchanges of words—verging on *repartee*, he was inclined to think conceitedly—which tended to render Hester so charming, naïve, and lovable. He should have quite a history to relate to Hester after dinner. Laurence Raxford was a man quickly at his ease, and always anxious to put others in the same position. He noted the embarrassment—intense and painful—of Milly Athorpe

at his presence there, and he made an effort to alter the position of affairs.

"Don't let me put you out, Miss Athorpe," he said, speaking very rapidly, "by my intrusion here—I'll only wait for the first outburst of wrath from these elements, and then effect my escape, chancing a wet jacket. Your uncle, Mr. Whiteshell, had strayed from the beaten track, and I thought it but fair—but Devonshire politeness—to put him in the right way as well as I could."

"And very much obliged to you I am," said Mr. Whiteshell, taking off his hat, and putting it on a little side-table near the window-sill, on which a host of plants was blooming; "what I should have done without you, I cannot readily conceive. An estimable young man this, Milly," he said, turning to his niece; "one who pays respect to grey hairs, however low the path on which their wearer plods his way."

"And however heavy the carpet-bag of the plodder?" added Laurence. He was half-inclined to say "the potterer," but corrected himself in time very politely.

"Ten thousand thanks from me for your assistance in that quarter, Mr. Raxford," he said,

"and ten thousand thanks from you for being full of health and strength to bear the burden lightly."

"Amen, with all my heart, sir," cried Raxford, cheerily, as this oddity turned, with some degree of dignity, to him, and spread out both hands, cased in shabby and crinkly black gloves, seemingly made from the hide of a rhinoceros.

"Uncle, this is Mr. Raxford—one of the proprietors."

A sweet and musical voice to add to Milly's dowry from nature, touched just a little with that Devonshire burr, which will not appear—unless on very necessary occasions—in these pages, a promise for which the reader will tender his best thanks, we hope. The introduction of the real accent into novels of locality adds not materially to the interest when well done, and when badly finished off, the saints have mercy on the reader! Take it for granted, then, that here and there lingered the faintest twang of the Tors in the speech of this Devonshire rose, and that in a few characters, less self-trained and regulated, whom the reader may meet—even in Captain Athorpe, who did not study accents—there was more than

a twang, which, to commit to print, would be superfluous and heart-rending.

"One of—the *what?*" asked Mr. Whiteshell, taken a little aback.

"One of the masters of Wheal Desperation—the new master," she added, dropping a curtesy to Laurence as she spoke.

"I tender an apology," said Mr. Whiteshell, stiffly; "and I consider myself still further indebted for the assistance proffered me. I was not to know—it was beyond my province to know—your state in life, without any information tendered me on your side, sir. Mr. Raxford, I have to thank you now for your great condescension."

Mr. Whiteshell sat down, very red in the face, and pulled at his long white moustache with a nervous hand, from which he had removed now the wild-beast skin. He was annoyed, it was evident; and he was inclined to think that in some way or other he had been the victim of an imposition. He did not see how, certainly; but there was a matter of grievance somewhere—this young man had evidently been making a jest of him, and enjoying the ignorance that had been evinced throughout.

"Really, upon my honour, sir," he added, quite warmly, as he detected a smile hovering round the corners of Laurence's mouth, "I see nothing to laugh at in indigent old age. We are all of one degree, sir, after all, and in my way, and in my own fashion, I stand on my position."

"My dear sir, do you think that I pride myself on mine, or would be foolish enough to smile at yours? Why, sir, I am an upstart myself, and indebted to the kindness of others, rather than to any exertion of my own, for the place I occupy just now. Hang it! pray do not set me down for a proud man, Mr. Whiteshell."

The heartiness of Laurence Raxford's protest softened Milly's uncle, who put his dignity into his pocket along with his last glove. The tetchy old gentleman rose and extended his hand to our hero across the table.

"Mr. Raxford, I appreciate your *bonhomie*—you are a true gentleman, at any rate, and acting as host for the nonce, I thank you for your presence, and bid you welcome, in my niece's name."

"We are honoured—" began Milly.

"Tut, tut!" interrupted Mr. Whiteshell, "we are all equal in the sight of the Lord, and we'll

talk no more of being honoured by Mr. Raxford's company. The gentleman himself does not wish to play the master here, and so the gentleman is welcome. What's for supper, Milly?"

Raxford sat down on a chair by the door, which opened, without any preliminary apology for a hall, upon the green slope up which he had recently climbed. He could hear the rain hissing and rattling on the porch under which he had first seen Milly Athorpe, and he was not sorry for the excuse that held him there a prisoner. He wished to understand the two beings before him there, and he was vexed at Mr. Whiteshell misunderstanding *him*, even after he had lugged that heavy carpet bag all the way from Wheal Desperation.

Milly bustled about and spread the supper-cloth upon the table, placing thereon some cream cheese and bread, tripping in and out of a little pantry facing the inner room—into which she had launched the *debris* of her studies—with a rapidity and grace of movement that her slight figure had already warranted.

The blushes had not died out of her face yet; they came and went rapidly whenever she felt that

the gentleman—"the new master"—was looking within two yards of her direction, and Laurence perceived that she felt relieved when she could turn her back towards him, and felt that she would be intensely grateful for the rain to cease and allow of his departure. He felt for Milly's nervousness, and looked no more towards her—on the contrary, opened the door once or twice, as if intensely hopeful of the rain's abatement,—and hopeful he was not just then, having to make a stand against false appearances.

Mr. Whiteshell unlocked his carpet-bag, and took therefrom a wine bottle, which he placed with emphasis upon the supper-table.

"Port wine is the right thing with cheese, I believe, Mr. Raxford," he said with a chuckle, "when I was better up in the fashion of the table—and, ha ! ha !—better up in the stirrups, it was considered so."

"Pray, do not open a bottle of wine for me," cried Laurence, "I am going in an instant, rain or no rain."

"Sir, we can have no more fitting occasion to drink wine in this house," said Mr. Whiteshell politely, "and it was brought here to drink, and not in any

way for ornament. You will share our humble meal with us, I hope? Why, Milly—only *two* plates, girl?”

“Oh! I did not think the gentleman——”

“Could be so humble as all that,” concluded Laurence, determined to dispel the illusion of his loftiness at once, “that is a good joke, when I’m as hungry as a hunter, Milly.”

He tried the effect of her Christian name; evidently she had not been called Miss Athorpe in her life before, and he had noticed that *that* at least had quenched every atom of whiteness in her complexion. He must be one of them heart and soul; it was very odd if he—who prided himself upon his knowledge of character, could not suit himself to his company for half an hour.

“Here goes,” he muttered to himself, “we’ll have no airs and graces here.”

He turned up the cuffs of his coat, made a dash at the loaf which was close to him, and flourished the first handy knife over it.

“Crust or crumb, Milly?—crust or crumb, Mr. Whiteshell?” he asked, without waiting for Milly’s answer—thereby sparing her fresh confusion. “I’m afraid that we are keeping late hours here for the

Cleft, and two of us at least have early work at the Wheal. Can you manage that corkscrew?—by George! it was lucky we did not smash the bottle in the dark—there was good packing before you left London, sir. I'll try a little cheese, Milly, please," he said; "my mother attempts cream-cheese sometimes, but the good lady is not a first-rate hand, though I consume her productions by steam, being passionately attached to anything connected with milk. Here's good health to both of you," he said, imitating very cleverly the duck of the head of sundry good folk who had drunk his health at the miner's dinner; "may it leave off raining as soon as it likes after I have robbed you of a supper, Milly."

"No robbery, sir," Milly ventured to respond.

"What—what do you think of this—vintage?" asked Mr. Whiteshell, holding his wine-glass to the candle, and staring with one eye only at a very thick mixture.

"Very fair wine!" responded the mendacious Laurence.

"Shaken up a bit in transit," said Mr. Whiteshell, "but still a decent beverage."

"When the crust settles again, it will be much

better. If you'll take my advice, you'll put it carefully on one side—chalk side uppermost—and not touch it any more till Sunday. It's almost a pity to drink it now."

"Well," said Mr. Whiteshell doubtfully, "perhaps it is—if you really won't, now?"

And he held the bottle towards Laurence's glass.

"No, no, many thanks !" cried Laurence, repressing a shudder; "it will be better and more clear if you leave it alone for a day or two. I have a fancy to try the spring water so famous in the Cleft."

"Milly's favourite drink, and always on tap here—something less than 'fourpence a pot in your own jugs,'" said Mr. Whiteshell, "and certainly more beneficial. I am almost a teetotaller myself, Milly."

"You by choice, uncle—and I by necessity."

"Oh! Bung, the Tavvydale brewer, would not care to send a four and a half gallon cask up the Cleft here—a worse job than carrying my carpet bag, Mr. Raxford."

"Yes, that's true. So," turning suddenly to Milly, "only a teetotaller by necessity?"

Milly blushed again.

"Well, I scarcely know, sir. I—I was alluding to a little jest of my uncle's, that is not worth relating again."

"Being so sorry a jest," said Mr. Whiteshell drily, "like most of Uncle James's jokes. Now, if Uncle Oliver——"

"There, if you're going to be jealous of Uncle Oliver again, you'll make me cross and unhappy!" cried Milly energetically.

"He's not what I call——"

"Hush!"

Milly glanced towards Laurence, and silenced Mr. Whiteshell for the nonce. Seeing that he looked a trifle discomfited beneath her reproof, she hastened to repeat her former words,

"Cross and unhappy, uncle," she said; "and I have been counting on this visit—looking forward, as you know, so long!"

"And you never are unhappy," said her uncle, brightening again, "not even in Wind-Whistle Cleft, Milly?"

"I hope not—never," said Milly confidently.

"That's well!" cried Mr. Whiteshell; "I like to hear you speak out like that. I hope to always

hear you answer just as bravely. They talk in books of the unattainableness of human happiness," he cried to Raxford, "and here, sir, in a Devonshire gap, is a young woman confessing that she is as happy as the day is long!"

"I never heard any one confess it before. Really happy, Milly?" Laurence asked incredulously, "with nothing to regret in the past, and nothing to sigh for?"

"No, no," she stammered, "not so happy as that, sir; for of course we all have regrets, and we all look forward—if it's even to heaven."

"Yes," said Laurence thoughtfully. It was a strange remark from the lips of one so young, and it embarrassed him by its earnestness for an instant.

"But I think—yes, I feel—that I am happy, uncle," she said, turning to Mr. Whiteshell, as if more able to make her exposition in that quarter. "I don't see why I should not be happy, for I have no one to please but myself in the Cleft, and I agree with my company very well indeed—though I don't let myself have my own way always."

"What do you mean by that?" asked her uncle.

"And everybody's kind to me," she cried enthusiastically, taking no heed of the interruption, "and I meet with so many friends, all anxious to do their best for me, and assist me, and give me my own way, that I feel quite selfish at times. Why, even Uncle Oliver, whom you don't agree with always, Uncle James," she added archly, "is the truest and best of friends, and I am very—very—much his debtor."

"Hum," grumbled Mr. Whiteshell.

"Do you know what I have been making up my mind to do this summer?" she cried, clapping her hands in her exultation, and forgetting Laurence Raxford entirely; "why, to make you and Uncle Oliver understand each other better, you keeping your sensitive nature down, and he showing more of the real kindness that is in him—for he is truly kind when he likes."

"Now if ever there was a representative of the nether millstone in our poor humanity, it's that man," asserted Mr. Whiteshell; "he gives offence at all turns, and to everybody—he's as proud as a peacock, and as rough as a bear. He don't regard feelings—he don't believe in them."

"Hush—hush—I say, you don't understand

him yet. Presently you will. When you go away, you will own to me how you have misjudged him."

"I shall be very happy, I'm sure. Perhaps he's better since his marriage—two years of that fun will take the impudence out of most men, and I should not be very much surprised if there were an improvement in that gentleman. God knows that there was room for it!"

"And I fight his battles for him in his absence, uncle," cried Milly, meaningly—"just as he fight's mine, or I fight yours. So we'll have no more bad thoughts between us, for they do no good—they never did—they never will! Now," speaking very quickly, "tell me of yourself, and how you have been getting on in that dry and dusty London."

"Where the free air never comes, you told me once."

"I am still of the same opinion," laughed Milly.

"Where the paths are not all manner of ways at once, and cumbered with roots and brambles, and that rubbish—slovenly picturesqueness, I call that. Why, they would not let such a place as the Cleft exist in London for any money. Am I not right, Mr. Raxford?"

"Quite right, so far as that goes," said Laurence, rising; "and just at the present time I am inclined to think that a gas lamp or two would be an improvement. I wonder if it rains now?"

Laurence opened the door and looked out, backing a step or two with a natural surprise, as a burly man, with a thick pilot coat turned up above his ears, almost thrust him back into the room.

"What are you doing here, man, and who are you?" roughly demanded Captain Athorpe, as he followed our hero into Milly's parlour.

"I'm waiting up for the rain, and my name's Raxford," answered Laurence—"is there any more information with which I can oblige you?"

"Oh! you, is it?—and *you*, too, Whiteshell?" he said, less harshly; "I didn't understand, and the *row* up here puzzled me. The Cleft has been a riddle to-night altogether, and I have been trying to solve it. *You're* not dead yet, then?" he asked Mr. Whiteshell.

"Not just at present, thank you all the same."

"Are you well?"

"Thank you again, yes."

"Then you don't look it. Milly," turning to

his niece, "did you hear a gun fired some time since?"

"No," answered Milly.

"I fired it. Somebody was skulking round here after no good, for he wouldn't answer, and I swore I'd fire if he didn't."

"Great heaven, Mr. Athorpe!"

"Captain Athorpe, if you please," was the stern correction.

"It's not worth arguing about," said Mr. Whiteshell; "but no one has a right to assume the title of Captain without he holds that rank in the army, navy, volunteer service, or militia; but if it pleases you——"

"Captain's my title in these parts; I worked my way up to it hard, and I've a right to it."

"Oh! very well. It's a singular fancy—I don't object; it don't hurt me," said the ruffled little man.

"Well, what were you going to say?"

"I was going to observe, Captain Athorpe, of the mineral service," said Mr. Whiteshell, caustically, "that you might have shot *me*, if you were so handy with your gun as all that. I have been wandering about the Cleft all night."

"Why did you not answer, then? Have you danced yourself deaf by this time?"

"You never addressed me, and I am very happy to say that you never fired at me, and unless you have a particular fancy to be tried for manslaughter, I would not advise you to fire at anybody else. It's not what I call a nice amusement."

Captain Athorpe's brow lowered a little at this polite sarcasm of the smaller man, but he did not reply immediately.

"It was hasty," said he at last—"I—I suppose that I lost my temper; but we have had a host of tramps about here, and one vagabond made off with no end of linen, only last week, from our hedge at the back."

"Ha! ha!—I beg pardon," cried Mr. Whiteshell—"did he, though, the rascal? After all Mrs. Athorpe's trouble of washing, too."

"Mrs. Athorpe never washes," said the mining captain; "if you knew more of us you'd know better than that. Will you make your stay at our place, Whiteshell?"

"*Mr.* Whiteshell," corrected the little gentleman in his turn.

"Well, Mr. Whiteshell."

"Thank you," said he, trying to repress a grimace; "I think I'll keep to the old quarters, if Milly don't mind."

"Why, it's a promise!" cried Milly, "and you must not leave me, Uncle James."

"It's a great trouble to the girl," remarked Captain Athorpe; "there's only this room and hers, and there's not much satisfaction in seeing you sprawling half the day on that sofa-bedstead, I take it. Besides, she can't afford it."

"Oh! yes, I can," cried Milly.

"Sir, I'm not a sponge," said Mr. Whiteshell. "Milly Athorpe is not likely to lose a great deal by my intrusion here. And as for your kind invitation, why——"

"Uncle James cannot accept it," said Milly very readily, "for he has promised to spend a clear week with me—and I must make amends for want of room by warmth of heart."

"Which—" began the crotchety gentleman again.

"Which is common to all good friends in Devon—on this side of the Dartmoor Tors," interrupted Milly again before he could continue. "There, shake hands with Uncle Oliver, and tell him that you'll come another time, but now, even for him, it isn't

fair to press you to break his word. Is it, sir?" turning to Laurence again.

Laurence, lost in admiration at Milly Athorpe's tact, aroused himself to say,

"Certainly it is not. Captain Athorpe will not press his friend to break a promise, I am sure."

"I press no man against his inclination," said Athorpe, as he shook hands somewhat reluctantly with Mr. Whiteshell. "There is my house by the Cleft if any one wishes to see me—I go out of my way to see no man. You are coming down the Cleft, Mr. Raxford?"

"Yes—at once."

"The rain is over—we have it all of a lump in Devon," said Athorpe. "This way, sir. Good night, Milly—good night, Whiteshell."

"Good night, Athorpe," replied Mr. Whiteshell.

Milly bade her uncle good night, dropped a second curtsey to the stranger; and then Raxford, after bidding good night also to Milly's uncle on the mother's side, followed Milly's uncle on the father's ditto, into Wind-Whistle Cleft.

"Now, sir," said Captain Athorpe sternly, as they were proceeding down the slope together, "I must trouble you for an explanation?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNCLE ON THE FATHER'S SIDE.

LAURENCE RAXFORD felt the blood rise to his cheeks, and his ears tingle unpleasantly at Captain Athorpe's question, crudely delivered as it was. He had not seen a great deal to admire in this brusque individual at any time, and though he was not the man to expect or wish that any obsequiousness should be paid him, even on the part of his servants, still he did expect, not unnaturally, to be regarded as a principal, and treated with a fair amount of deference.

Laurence answered, curtly enough :

"What do you mean?"

"I ask you for an explanation, Mr. Raxford," repeated Captain Athorpe. "I don't see that you have any reason to make yourself at home in my niece's cottage—and I dispute your right to be there."

"Why?"

"Why?" almost shouted Athorpe in his ear—"why, because she is a girl as completely alone in the world as she is in Wind-Whistle Cleft, and if I didn't look after her, no one else would. Because she is young and pretty, and there are men who prowl after good girls' souls, just as if they held commissions from the devil. Because I know the world—I have knocked about in three-fourths of it—and I am sceptical of much good in it. And because I don't know *you*."

"If you knew me better you would trust me more."

"I don't believe that," contradicted Athorpe. "The more I know of a man, the less I like him, as a rule. Showy and bright at first, occasionally, but on close inspection full of flaws. Now, you have no right to be in Milly's cottage, or seek Milly's society. She is a good girl—I don't think there's a better anywhere—and I would not have her head turned by any fulsome flatteries from those above her in position. I promised her mother—though she was no friend of mine, mark you—that I would watch over the orphan whom she left behind in the Cleft, and I always keep my word."

Laurence bowed to the good intentions of Captain Athorpe; he respected them, and would assist them.

"You are right to demand an answer from me," said Laurence, "and if you had not been so hasty, I would have given it you long ago. I made my first appearance at the Cleft to-night in the character of guide to Mr. Whiteshell, who had lost his way."

"Your first appearance?"

"Yes."

"And how many times have you spoken to Milly?"

Raxford coloured again at this cross-questioning, but the darkness in the Cleft spared his indignant blushes.

"I saw your niece for the first time this evening."

"For the first time in the Cleft, you mean."

"For the first time in my life, sir," said Laurence, sharply; "and now, if you please, we will dismiss the subject."

"Very good. But as she works at the mine, and is superintendent of a batch of girls there, it don't seem very likely that you——"

"Good night," said Laurence, suddenly striding on in advance of the doubter, and making off at a rapid pace along the narrow footpath. He thought that he had freed himself from this obnoxious being, and had asserted his own dignity at the same time, when Captain Athorpe came on after him, taking two strides to his one, and gaining on him rapidly, greatly to the annoyance of our hero, who had prided himself heretofore on being a rapid walker. He had a great mind to run for it, but his pride resisted an undignified retreat, and after a few more paces he allowed his persecutor to overtake him.

Captain Athorpe came swiftly upon Laurence, his heavy feet crushing down everything in his way, and a few minutes afterwards he laid a hand that felt like lead on the shoulder of the young man in advance of him.

"Wait a bit. I did not think that you were a bad-tempered man."

"You would try the patience of a saint, Athorpe."

"There, I believe all that you have told me. If I did not put my questions gracefully, why, I am not a graceful man, and that must be my

excuse. I am watchful and suspicious of most things."

"That must make you very miserable at times."

"It may—at times," he repeated; "and now, you are a hot-headed fellow, like myself. That's singular."

"I am not hot-headed, Athorpe. It takes a great deal to aggravate me, and if you will consider the question at your leisure, you will find that I have had to swallow a great deal to-night."

"There, we'll say no more about it. I don't dislike *you* at present. There's a something in you which perhaps I *might* like after a while," he added, thoughtfully.

"Thank you," was the dry response.

Captain Athorpe laughed not unpleasantly.

"Ah! you don't know what a compliment that is, Mr. Raxford," he said; "and now about your hot temper—take my advice, and don't give way to it any more."

"I tell you——"

"Yes, I know. No man is aware of his own imperfections—that is a strange truth, which puzzles me still, as well as other people. I used to

be a very hasty man, but I've mastered myself with a strong hand."

Laurence thought of the shot that Captain Athorpe had fired in the Cleft that night, but held his peace to avoid further argument.

"You would not think to look at me—to judge by what you have heard of me at the mine, or from Mr. Fyvie, or old Waters at the office—that I had ever been a desperate character—a man whom nobody trusted, and whom everybody feared—a reckless, extravagant, half mad, drunken vagabond."

He stamped on the ground with every epithet that he bestowed upon himself, as though he would stamp the shame of his past life beneath the surface as he walked.

"No, I should not have thought that."

"What would you have thought?"

"That you were a very steady, hard-working, honest, obstinate, conceited fellow," answered Laurence readily. That was his opinion of Captain Athorpe, and he very coolly expressed it.

"I don't consider myself obstinate, only firm now and then," said Athorpe quickly; "and as for conceit, that's a lie. But I wish that you would

hear me out—I think that I'm worth listening to."

"I am all attention," answered Laurence.

"I think that I make a decent sort of moral to young men like you. Most men in my place would have never *wrenched* themselves back to an honest, temperate life. I was steady enough in your father's time, when Wheal Desperation was a bad speculation—but when I went abroad, I went wrong, all at once, all manner of ways, possessed by unclean spirits. I don't know that I ever shirked my work—for I took no man's money under false pretences—but after the work, Mr. Raxford, I was a very brute—hated and feared as dangerous brutes are."

"And what saved you?"

"Half a dozen things—a shock to my system, as I stood in peril of my life being dashed away from me with only a moment left to ask God to forgive me—the example of a man as good as I was bad, and one of my own set—the rescue from danger, and the sudden consciousness that came over me, shewing me how truly bad I was. I took an oath—I kept it—even the oath against drink, which was the hardest to hold on to and live. So

never be hasty, Mr. Raxford, it's the outpouring of evil."

"I shall remember your confession."

"It's a confession I'm proud of—*conceited* about," he said with emphasis. "I returned to England a quiet man, engaged to one of the best of women—my wife now, sir—and so I'm thankful and at peace. If you ask in Tavvydale the character of Captain Athorpe, you'll get a good one."

"Yours was a hard fight, and a successful one. I begin to understand you, just a little."

"I am glad of that. No man likes to be misunderstood," said Athorpe. "Here's the rain again. We shall have these heavy showers all night."

"I hope that they will keep off until I get back to the mine."

"My house is at the opening of the Cleft, and if you will accept of a bed, it is at your service."

"Thank you—but——"

"But you do not like to be beholden to your servants. Well, it is a good feeling."

"It is not mine, at any rate."

"That's a silly old fellow—that Whiteshell,"

said Captain Athorpe, darting off at a tangent to a new subject; "no harm in the man, but precious little good—that is, good sense, at any rate," he added with a jerk.

"Milly's uncle, I understand."

"Yes, on the mother's side," he replied disparagingly. "Softshell would have been the best name for that family—they were all addled, sir, everyone of them. How Milly grew up so shrewd and quick a girl has always puzzled me. For even my brother—one of the Athorpe stock—had not his natural change—and was terribly obstinate."

The darkness of the Cleft disguised Laurence Raxford's smile, or Athorpe might have found fresh cause for offence.

"As for this Whiteshell—poor, poverty-stricken old ape, with his jumpings and grimacings—I can't say I admire him. Milly likes him, and I daresay he's fond of Milly—but his company for a week or two must be a terrible nuisance."

"With that impression it was very kind of you to offer your hospitality to the gentleman."

Captain Athorpe laughed.

"I did that to aggravate him partly, for he had been sneering at me enough—you saw that. He's

full of sneers at people—he always was fond of that kind of game. I knew that he would never come to my house.”

“Then your concern for the inconvenience to which Milly would be exposed by his stay there was not genuine?” Raxford could not refrain from saying.

“Yes, it was,” was the quick reply. “I’m always genuine, thank God! And if he had come, I would have done my best to make him feel at home with us. Though I did not expect him to say ‘Yes’—though it was one of my jokes, the invitation—still I should have been flattered a bit by his acceptance of the offer, and he would have been none the less welcome at my house. But he was too proud, you see—though what he has to be proud of you’ll *never* see, if you live till doomsday.”

“He has been in a better position of life, I imagine?”

“A trifle better,” said Athorpe; “somebody left him five hundred pounds, and he lost it in a fool’s way, as might have been expected. He hired a theatre at the fag end of a season, when nobody was in town, and the weather was as hot as fury, and away went his money at once. He fancied

that all the world was coming to see him dance in his new ballet."

"Dance?" repeated Laurence.

"He has been a ballet-master—ballet dancer at the royal houses, cutting all kinds of capers in his life. He's a dancing-master now," said Athorpe, with bitter scorn; "struggling on in some back street or other, Westminster way, living from hand to mouth, poor wretch! He'll dance his shaky old legs into the grave, and there will be an end of him. What an occupation for a man with a soul in him!"

"Every one must live," said Raxford, "lucky for the world that even out-of-the-way professions have their admirers. What a state of affairs if there were no dancing-masters, Athorpe!"

"All the better," said Athorpe; "what's the good of dancing?—it's a snare and a delusion—it leads to no end of harm. I won't have him teach Milly his dodges—we quarreled upon that point the last time he was here. Whew! here comes the rain in earnest now, Mr. Raxford. Shall we run for it?"

"Is it far to the end of the Cleft?"

"Oh! no distance now. It's no use standing

under these trees, they're wet through already."

As he spoke, a flash of lightning, blue and vivid, lit up the ravine, bringing suddenly into relief the bold masses of rock lowering on either side, the oddly-twisted trees growing therefrom, the rich luxuriance of foliage above, around, and under foot, the stream below beset with many difficulties in its progress down the Cleft, and struggling against them with low murmurings, that went "on for ever."

"No—I do not care particularly for trees just now," said Raxford, breaking into a run along with Captain Athorpe.

"You'll have to put up at the miner's house, sir," said Athorpe, with a short laugh.

"I'm afraid that I shall be troubling Mrs. Athorpe at this time of night?"

"We are not people who mind trouble—and we can't let you go by us in the storm, though we're not always *genuine*, Mr. Raxford."

"You brood on words hastily uttered, captain," said Laurence; "and that is a bad habit."

"Well, well—I am not a saint—I never set myself up for one," was the reply; "take me as you find me, rough and ready, quick to resent an

affront, but just as quick to return a kindness, and there's Captain Athorpe to the life. I know my own character—if other people knew me as well, I should not have an enemy in Tavvydale."

"You have no enemy, I am sure."

"One or two make me out morose, ill-tempered, unjust, anything—well, let 'em. What should I care for their opinions?—what *do* I care?"

"Exactly," answered Laurence, for the want of a better reply at the instant; "have we much further to run? I shall be wet through before I reach your house."

Ere he could resist the attention, a thick bear-skin cape, which Athorpe had been wearing, was flung from the miner's shoulders to those of Laurence, and twisted in a suffocating fold about his neck.

"I forgot that I had it on," said Athorpe, as Laurence struggled and protested; "and you're a man who can't stand change like me. I've been in all kinds of weather, and nothing hurts me—nothing can hurt me, for I'm made of iron and brass. I won't take it back, so it's no good your wriggling like that, sir."

Laurence protested no further. Captain Athorpe

had shot on in advance, and it was impossible for Laurence to overtake him. At the mouth of the Cleft he was standing coolly in the rain, waiting for our hero's appearance.

"Yon's our home," he said, pointing to a house a short distance in advance, and which the lightning illumined for an instant; "we'll make a run across the open to it, when you've got your breath."

"I'm all right," said Laurence "when you're ready."

"Oh! I'm always ready. Now, sir."

The two men ran swiftly across the wild grass or moorland that sloped upwards from the Cleft, the lightning flashing about them, and the thunder reverberating overhead. When they were close upon the house, proceeding along a gravel path towards it, Captain Athorpe let the leaden weight of his hand fall again on the shoulder of his companion.

"I welcome you to an honest home, sir. You do me honour by your coming."

He hammered with the handle of the stick he carried on the door, taking no heed of the dainty brass knocker ready to his touch. A maid-servant, evidently scared by the storm, with her eyes

distended, and her cap awry, opened the door, candle in hand.

“Once more welcome, Mr. Raxford. This way, sir—Mrs. Athorpe will be very glad to see you.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN ATHORPE AT HOME.

MRS. OLIVER ATHORPE, warned of the visitor's approach, was standing in the front room prepared for company.

"This is my wife," said Captain Athorpe, by way of introduction—"this is Mr. Raxford, Inez, the new partner at the mines."

"Mr. Raxford favours our poor home indeed," murmured Mrs. Athorpe, glancing at our hero for an instant, and then looking down upon the carpet.

"Not at all, Mrs. Athorpe," cried Laurence; "rather say that Mr. Raxford is a very selfish man to intrude himself upon your notice at so late an hour."

"All hours suit us, Mr. Raxford," said Athorpe; "we are not regular people here. Sit down, please. Inez, where's the wine, and brandy and things—and the cigars. Sit down, Mr. Raxford."

It's not so poor a home as my wife would have you believe, you know," he added, with a comprehensive sweep of his hand; "but poor or rich, you're welcome."

It was a well-furnished room; in the eyes of the Devonshire captains who visited here occasionally, a grandly furnished apartment, indicative of much pomp and pride in their comrade. The furniture was good, if heavy, and solid enough for the board-room of a public company—consisting of tables and chairs of Spanish mahogany, the seats of the latter covered with maroon leather, evidently with an eye to wear and tear. The floor was carpeted with a florid Brussels, and the walls were adorned with several oil paintings, some of them looking almost old and undistinguishable enough to be valuable. Upon the tables, the side-boards, in the recesses by the fire-place, even in the fire-place itself, and on the mantel-piece, were scattered many incongruous ornaments, relics of Captain Athorpe's wanderings—tusks of ivory, shells of odd shapes, sizes, and colour, lumps of copper, lead, gold and silver ore, fossils, dried plants, stuffed birds, a dagger in a sheath, a bilious-looking violin, with quaint carvings up its back,

and in one corner the identical gun which Captain Athorpe had let off in the Cleft that evening, with a very good chance of reducing the number of Milly's relations.

Laurence Raxford noticed the furniture and adornments by degrees and at a later time, Mrs. Athorpe sufficiently arresting his attention at the period of which we treat. A lady of five or six-and-twenty at the utmost, and young enough to have been Captain Athorpe's daughter—possessing almost as slight a figure, but with less etheriality about it, as Milly of the Cleft, but having the advantage of height, Laurence thought, as he mentally compared the two women whom he had met that evening. Mrs. Athorpe was pretty also—had he not had Milly's face before him still, Laurence would have been struck with her olive skin, her raven hair and eyes, the contrast she presented to the pure white and red of the Devonshire complexions. It was scarcely an English face, Laurence would have felt assured, had not the accents of her voice already struck him as peculiar, if not foreign. Still she spoke English well and clearly, and it might be the Devonshire burr after all. She was certainly a wife for a man

like Athorpe to prize and be proud of; and Athorpe thought so still, though he had been married two years. Two years ago this lady, of whom we are treating, had suddenly taken her place at his side in the miner's chapel at Tavvydale, and become his wife. Where she had come from, Tavvydale folks did not know, and those who sought to inquire were informed, not too civilly, by Athorpe, that she was an old sweetheart for whom he had been waiting many years, and who had been waiting many years for him—where she had waited, and why she had waited, was simply the business of Captain Athorpe and his wife, and so they ventured to tell the few daring enough to press them close with questions.

Mrs. Athorpe opened the doors of her mahogany cellaret, and speedily produced the alcoholic fluids for which her liege lord had inquired.

"Really, I am ashamed to see you make all these preparations," said Laurence. "This is evidently a conspiracy to detain me till the next shower comes on."

"This one hasn't gone off yet," returned Athorpe; "do you hear the thunder?"

All three stopped to listen, and Mrs. Athorpe

added, "It's a dreadful storm. Mr. Raxford will not surely think of venturing to the Wheal to-night?"

"I have told Mr. Raxford we have plenty of room, Inez," said Captain Athorpe; "and he will change his mind, doubtless, if the storm continues, which it will. Mix for yourself, sir, if you feel inclined to patronize the grog. Or will you try the sherry, with my wife here? It's as good sherry as the stuff at the mine, with which they would have made me drunk, if I had let them. Now, sir, what *will* you take?"

Captain Athorpe, as host, was at his best. Under his own fig-tree, he showed and evinced considerable geniality. His roughness sat well upon him even, and was not ungraciousness. He was nervous whilst Raxford remained dry-lipped in his establishment; and Laurence, seeing this, hastened at once to mix some whiskey and water for himself. Captain Athorpe watched the operation attentively, and his wife, with one small hand—on which were half a dozen jewelled rings—beating a quiet little tattoo on the cloth, surveyed the operator furtively.

"Cigars," said Captain Athorpe; "though I don't smoke myself, I keep cigars for those that

do. Try the cigars, Mr. Raxford, whilst we have half an hour's chat together, about the business, or something."

"I seldom smoke," answered Laurence, with a glance at Mrs. Athorpe.

"Oh! I do not object to smoking, Mr. Raxford," said Mrs. Athorpe, quickly; "or I would not allow—under any pretence—a cigar to be lighted in my presence. Would I, Noll?—am I not absolute here, dear?"

Captain Athorpe's face beamed with smiles, as he looked at his wife laughing across at him.

"She gives me my own way in everything, and thus spoils me for the world wherein there's no chance of getting it," cried Athorpe; "that's why I'm so bad-tempered out of doors, sir."

"His own way!" cried his wife, with an affectation of pettishness that was slightly foreign, Laurence thought again; "why, Mr. Raxford, after all, my husband is a very tyrant here, and for peace's sake, I am amiable and good."

"A tyrant!—what in?" asked Athorpe.

"In your rules and regulations, to be sure—in the order and management of this fine house—in housekeeping matters, which men are so clever in

—and in the colours of one's dress even. Oh! quite a Blue Beard!"

Captain Athorpe struck that heavy hand of his smartly upon his knee.

"That's good—that's good," he cried, laughing; "see how patiently I can sit here, and suffer myself to be condemned. Half a glass of weak brandy and water, only, Inez, for the tyrant—I have had one glass to-night, and this is in excess. I'm a mind," he said, suddenly and gravely, "not to touch any more."

Mrs. Athorpe thought that it would not hurt him after the rain that he had been in, and Captain Athorpe offering no further protest, the glass of brandy and water was shortly at his side.

"A single man has a right to show his politeness," said Athorpe; "but we old married fogies must not humour the fair sex too much, or we get imposed upon. Then, of course, we're tyrants."

He looked at his wife, and laughed very heartily again. A man who could laugh like that, and look like that at his helpmate, was not an unhappy man. This brusque individual would improve upon acquaintance.

"Ah! but the fair sex humour the married fogies,

at all events—or what would become of us poor women, Mr. Raxford?”

“That’s a good—have you had any supper?” he inquired, with a precipitancy that made Laurence start; “I quite forgot to ask. Inez, Mr. Raxford has only had a wretched bit of bread and cheese at the most, and I *think*,” he added, ironically, “we have something better to offer him in this house. Where’s that cold lamb?—where’s that——”

“My dear Athorpe,” entreated our hero, “I never take supper as a rule, and I have already fared well, and to my taste, at your niece’s cottage in the Cleft.”

Mrs. Athorpe’s dark eyes were full of life and interest suddenly. The miner’s wife was equally vigilant concerning Milly, it seemed.

“Our niece’s cottage!—have you been there, sir?” she exclaimed in surprise.

“A nice young man this you see, Inez?” said Athorpe, indulging in an emphatic wink at Laurence, “I hope that you will give it him well, for I made no impression upon him, save to rouse his temper. I told him that it was not quite the thing to pay visits to young ladies living in lonely huts

down the Cleft, and that we were sponsors here for Milly, but he objected to my interference."

"You are joking, Noll," said Mrs. Athorpe, but still with evident uneasiness, "you would not have brought this gentleman home, or been in so pleasant a mood with every one to-night, if you had found him at Milly's cottage. Now, Noll, dear, what is it?"

"I found him in Milly's cottage—more, having supper with Milly."

Mrs. Athorpe's lips compressed. Her hands interlaced themselves uneasily, and one or two joints more rigid than the rest cracked ominously. She sat there, looking very thoughtful for a while, no one offering to break the silence, and Laurence leaving the joke—the point of which he did not see very clearly—to the promoter of it, sitting with great complacency in his easy chair-opposite.

"At supper with Milly at that time of night," said Mrs. Athorpe at last, "I did not think that Milly was so foolish and imprudent." Detecting a smile playing upon the features of her husband, she said more eagerly, more sharply, "Noll, surely it is not possible—you haven't allowed—you cannot think it right that Milly and Mr.

—Mr. Raxford, I think you said—should form any en——”

“Hold hard, my dear!” shouted Captain Athorpe in his alarm, “that’s a wrong conclusion and a foolish one—don’t jump at it and hurt everybody’s feelings. Ha! ha! that’s too good a joke—how quick you women are! Ha! ha! that’s something like a joke—what would Milly say to that, I wonder?”

“It is a joke that we have carried far enough, Noll,” said Mrs. Athorpe very pettishly; “you should know better than to tease me so.”

“Well, I’m a brute—I always was a brute—ask the good souls in Tavvydale what I deserve, and you’ll guess what an unutterable savage I am then,” said Athorpe. “I’ll not tantalize you any further, Inez. My young friend here, sitting so patiently under suspicion all this time, has been acting as guide to a friend of ours to-night.”

“What friend?”

“The old fellow of whom you’ve heard me speak more than once—Milly’s uncle James.”

“James—Whiteshell?”

“Yes.”

“Milly’s uncle,” she said thoughtfully—“Mr. Whiteshell?”

"Yes, I said so."

"Indeed! And he is staying at the Cleft with Milly, you say?"

"I didn't say so, wife, but he is, for all that. He'll have a fortnight of it, and then go home with the horrors in full blow. He's a queer old stick. He would not come here at any price—I tried him, but it was no use. Mr. Raxford says that I was not genuine in my invitation, but I was. I meant what I said—if I don't admire the old boy, I would have saved Milly the trouble of boarding and lodging him; but he don't admire me either, and that's awkward and humiliating. Mr. Raxford, do mix for yourself again. Inez, see to Mr. Raxford's glass."

He pushed the whiskey bottle across to Laurence, who shook his head and held up his glass half-full of the potent fluid still. Mrs. Athorpe woke up suddenly as from a dreamy unconsciousness of passing things, and assumed an animated manner on the instant, that puzzled Laurence, and even embarrassed him.

Yes, she was undoubtedly of foreign extraction, thought Laurence—sprightly, naïve, and interesting, betraying a trifle too much anxiety about the

whiskey not being to Laurence's taste, an exaggerated fear that the water had not been hot enough, or that Mr. Raxford did not like whiskey, or was debarring himself the satisfaction of a cigar out of compliment to her, who liked cigar-smoke *so* much! She was not happy—it made her despair to see Mr. Raxford *so* abstemious—would he attempt a second glass of whiskey and water, if she mixed it for him, after a method of her own, of which she was a little vain—really?

"She mixes grog like an angel, sir," affirmed Captain Athorpe, with becoming pride; "I should not have asked you to mix for yourself, with Inez—princess of all mixers—in the room. Clear away Mr. Raxford's luke-warm wash, girl, and take no denial. We may never have the honour again of a principal's company—and we'll tyrannize over him, now he's in our power."

"The rain has abated, I think," murmured Laurence, by way of an excuse to withdraw.

"It's like the deluge outside," said Athorpe; "can't you hear it?"

There was a pause at this appeal, and the heavy rain without made itself heard on the instant, rushing and hissing furiously. The thunder rolled

heavily along too, as they listened, and the lightning flickered behind the window blinds, and, like a spirit of unrest, was not still an instant.

"It's a terrible night, and Mr. Raxford is our prisoner. Say you surrender, sir," she said.

She laughed, and shook her head at him, almost with a girlish sauciness. Yes, foreign decidedly, thought Laurence again—Frenchy, and inclined to overdo her style. She was very pretty, thus animated and evidently conscious of her prettiness; but the uncharitable impression seized Laurence on the instant, that all those little shrugs and attitudes and smiles were not so much impromptu as studies from the life, and before a dressing-glass. He did not like her manner—take it altogether—and he was not quite certain that Captain Athorpe looked quite as amiable as he did a few minutes since.

"I think that I had better borrow your bearskin, and make a run for it, Captain," Laurence suggested.

Captain Athorpe shook his head.

"We wouldn't turn a dog out such a night as this," he said. "Inez, when you have mixed that

fresh whiskey, will you see that the best room is prepared for Mr. Raxford?"

Inez would see to it with great pleasure in a few minutes—but she must not be disturbed now—not for all the world—in this spirituous compound before her.

"There, Mr. Raxford!" she said at last, triumphantly; "when I come back, I anticipate all kinds of compliments."

"Oh! certainly," said Laurence; "you may rely upon me."

Mrs. Athorpe departed with a musical laugh, and as the door closed behind her, Captain Athorpe turned immediately to our hero.

"What do you think of her?"

"Who?—Mrs. Athorpe?" asked Laurence, taken aback for an instant by this leading question.

"Yes. Isn't she a bright, lively girl, of whom any man might be proud?"

Laurence felt compelled to respond in the affirmative.

"And she is always the same, sir," said Athorpe, with a beaming face; "just the wife for me—just the wife I thought that I should take long ago, if I ever married and made myself a cheerful home."

I come back from my work at the mine, half mad with rage at all the fools under me, who don't know their business ; I come back full of a bitter gloom, that feels like a load upon me—and which isn't natural or to be accounted for, but there it is—and always here I feel the gloom go back, and the rage melt away, and I'm as happy as a king ! It's then I feel it not so hard—for it is hard work sometimes—to be religious, for I'm chockfull of gratitude ! You understand me ?”

“ Perfectly.”

“ I daresay you think I'm an old fool—for I'm going on for fifty sharp—to talk like this. Well, I don't talk very often in this fashion, for I've a habit of keeping my thoughts to myself. I was an old fool, everybody hinted, to marry so young a wife—but I knew my own mind, and I knew Inez to be a good girl.”

“ Is Mrs. Athorpe an Englishwoman, may I ask ?”

“ Her mother was French—I knew her mother,” replied the captain. “ I was a long while making up my mind to marry, you see, for I thought it scarcely fair on my little housekeeper—a brave, bright, and good girl, that Mily !”

“ She was your housekeeper, then ?”

"Yes, till I married; then she went back to her father's old crib in the Cleft—a little place that Mr. Fyvie settled on her after my brother's death in his service. She's just as happy there as she was taking care of me—she's a girl that is happy anywhere."

"Who is that?" asked Mrs. Athorpe, entering.

"Our Milly," answered her husband.

"Oh! happy enough, I daresay," carelessly remarked Mrs. Athorpe.

Laurence fancied again that the red lips were compressed together, for an instant, and that a shade of seriousness settled upon the young wife's face.

"She is a happy-looking girl," commented Laurence.

"Do you think so?" was the quick answer of Mrs. Athorpe. "And pretty, of course? All men think Milly pretty."

"Yes, she is very pretty," asserted Laurence.

"I never saw it myself," she said, tapping the table again with her nervous fingers. "White and red, like a doll, certainly, but that's all."

"My wife was always inclined to be jealous of Milly, Mr. Raxford," laughed Athorpe. "You

know what critics women are of each other, I daresay?"

"Jealous of Milly!" cried Mrs. Athorpe, indignantly; "not I, indeed. I only smile sometimes to hear her over-praised. It is this over-praise which has made the girl so vain—so far above her station. You know that!"

Athorpe scratched his head nervously.

"No—I don't," he ventured to assert. "She's independent, self-reliant, brave, but she isn't vain. And she keeps the louts at arm's length; and well she may, for a more clumsy, or thicker-headed lot of clodpoles than we have at Tavvydale, I never hope to meet."

"Mr. Raxford does not wish to sit here all night, Noll, and hear the praises of your favourite," said the wife.

"I daresay not; but I am an old bird with two chicks, Mr. Raxford, and you will excuse my crowing over them for once. Just try that whiskey, now. Hanged if you won't let *that* get cold next, sir."

Laurence drank the whiskey, and pronounced it admirable. Mrs. Athorpe smiled again, and said that he was only flattering her, and that she was

sure that Mr. Raxford was a great flatterer—a terrible man.

Laurence went up to his room shortly afterwards, Captain Athorpe leading the way, with a candle in each hand, like a host of the old school.

"There, you'll sleep well, sir, if the thunder will let you," said Athorpe, placing the candles on the dressing-table. "Good night to you."

"Good night."

When Captain Athorpe went into his own room, he nearly fell over the skirts of his wife, outspread across the carpet, on which she was kneeling, with her hands before her face.

"Inez! why, what's the matter?"

Inez rose hurriedly, and with an agitated face.

"Nothing, Noll, dear, I was praying. Praying for you and me to be always happy together. I don't think so—oh! I don't believe so sometimes."

"Why, what has upset you—the storm, or the grand company we have had, or that one glass of sherry at which you sat sipping like a bird?"

"The company, perhaps. I don't like company—I am always happy here alone, and strange faces upset me, Noll. You know how sensitive and nervous I am."

"Well, yes."

"It's very kind of you to ask Mr. Raxford, and for him to come. But we can't make a friend of him, even if we wished."

"We're as good as he is, if we're not so rich, girl. And he's a man I think that I could take to. There's a straightforwardness in him that pleases me—it's something like my own!"

"Yes, but we don't want his patronage—it's no use to us, and we're above it," she said; "and you're so soon vexed and dissatisfied, that presently you and he would quarrel—I know that—and then *that* would damage your position at the mine."

"I'm not afraid of my position, wife. Noll Athorpe is considered worth his money anywhere."

"But you are quarrelsome. You don't deny that yourself. The less you see of a man, the better friends you are with him."

"That's true as a rule," said Athorpe thoughtfully, "and of course I don't think of asking Mr. Raxford here again."

"And—and this Mr. Whiteshell?"

"Ah!—what of him?"

"I am so glad, so very glad, that you did not

bring him home with you, dear Noll—you would have quarreled with *him*, you know.”

“Yes—that’s probable, I must say. He’d vex a saint in no time.”

“And then home would have been less happy, and you would have liked it less.”

“No—I think not, whilst the woman I loved made it bright with her smiles, Inez. There, we’ll keep no company, and ask nobody to see us—I think we are happier by ourselves, myself.”

“I’m sure we are.”

Captain Athorpe was in bed and fast asleep, a few minutes afterwards. He remembered being woke by a rattling peal of thunder an hour and a half later, and opening his eyes he discovered that his wife was sitting up in bed at his side, with her hands clutching her elbows, and her figure swaying slowly to and fro, as though its owner were in pain.

“Inez—Inez—what’s the matter? Aren’t you well?”

“I am afraid of the storm, Noll. I can’t sleep to-night—and yet, I—I think I must have dozed off sitting here.”

“And woke up in a fright with the thunder—

that's it. There, lie down and shut your eyes again. Good night."

"Good night Noll," she repeated, lying down at his side thus adjured; but when Captain Athorpe was sleeping heavily again, the restless woman silently struggled into a sitting position once more, and resumed that train of thought—whatever it might be—from which he had disturbed her.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. WHITESHELL IS LEFT TO HIS OWN RESOURCES.

LAURENCE was up early the next morning, but Captain Athorpe was before him, and ready with a breakfast which our hero had hoped to escape.

"You will excuse my wife," Athorpe said, "when I tell you that she slept badly last night. She's a nervous, excitable woman, and the storm was a little too much for her."

"Pray make no apologies," said our hero. "I am afraid that I detained you both to a late hour last night."

"Not at all. We are not very early people at any time," said Athorpe; "sit down, sir, and make yourself at home. You will not think anything of Inez's absence?"

"Certainly not."

"She knows well enough what is due to a

guest—she is well-bred and well-born,” said Captain Athorpe; “we both are *au fait* at all that, for we’ve mixed in society in our day—both having been travellers. What do you think of our place here?”

Laurence, taken aback by the question, thought, however, that it was a nice comfortable home.

“Ay, that’s the phrase,” said Athorpe, “a nice comfortable home! Well, I’m proud to say it is. I worked up for it and Inez, and there it is, and some money to back it in Tavvydale Bank. If I was to go suddenly out of the world—as my elder brother did, Milly’s father—I shouldn’t leave Inez so badly off.”

“That must be a great satisfaction to your mind,” said Laurence.

“It is,” answered Athorpe; “and seven hundred and fifty pounds isn’t a bad sum to save for a man like me—and all this grand furniture, too, mind. You can see that *that* cost money.”

“Oh! yes—I can see that.”

“Very good then.”

Athorpe gulped down his coffee after this at a rapid rate, and as five was striking by the eight-day clock on his stairs, the mining captain and his

principal sallied from the house towards the mine.

All the way to business, Captain Athorpe was frank and communicative; he was a man who disguised nothing that morning; who, having made a certain way in life for himself, was proud of it. He earned a hundred, or a hundred and fifty pounds a year at Wheal Desperation, and that contented him, and raised him above his fellows. He was vain of his superiority, his position in the mining village of Tavvydale, but there was a rough simplicity in his self-conceit that was not disagreeable to witness, when once the man was thoroughly appreciated. In Tavvydale, too, he had done good in his day; and if he were not admired or always thanked for his good deeds, it was owing more to the rough manner, or the ill-temper of the giver, than to any want of effort on his part to deserve people's gratitude. There were times when he was *almost* understood, and then everything was marred by some harsh words or ungenerous suspicion. He was only at his best within his cottage at the opening to the Cleft; but as he kept no company, and as the few who knew him came only on business there three or four

times a year, Captain Athorpe had not been seen at his best, save by his wife, his niece, and Laurence Raxford.

The day was bright and fine, after the heavy rain, and as they struck into the high road within three quarters of a mile of Wheal Desperation, they came upon the miners, and their wives and daughters, from Tavvydale, flocking towards the several mines amongst the Dartmoor hills. Those who were of Mr. Fyvie's community touched their caps, or dropped their curtseys, to Laurence and Captain Athorpe, wondering a little at the propinquity of master and man.

One man of six feet three in height at least, loose-limbed and awkward, sandy-haired, and with a face so full of freckles that it looked as though he had dipped his head into a pailful of them, touched his cap with the rest, though Laurence felt assured that the young giant did not belong to Fyvie's mine.

"Marning, Captain," he said to Athorpe; "she be on yander."

He grinned from ear to ear, and jerked his thumb in the direction they were going.

"Morning, Chardock," answered Athorpe; "and who is she?"

Churdock blushed like a girl, but he laughed like a horse at this question.

"Why, you know—o' course. There she go."

"Who—Milly?"

"Es—es."

"Then why the deuce didn't you say so?"

"I did. She's as spry as a lapwing this marning. She got company at the Cleft."

"Oh! you know that, too. You didn't get a shot in you last night, did you—humbugging about there in the dark?"

"Who—Oi? I warn't there."

"When were you in the Cleft, then?"

"This marning."

"What's the good of *you* being there?—it isn't your way home, or near your home, unless you climb the rocks."

"Noa," answered Churdock, beginning to grin again, and then becoming suddenly very serious, "it isn't."

"And as nobody wants you there, you must be a bit of nuisance."

"That's true, Captain, I'm afeard," said Churdock, looking fiercely at the ground—"I don't say that ain't true."

"Ah! you're a poor mite," said Athorpe striding past him.

"And that ain't true neither," shouted Churdock after the Captain; "and you know better."

"So I do," said Athorpe to Laurence, as they walked on at a good pace towards the mine; "but it's as well to freshen that fellow up a bit."

"Who is he?"

"One of Milly's admirers—a fellow at Clifford's mine—Bully Churdock we call him in the village. Milly could lead him anywhere by holding up her little finger; but the devil himself couldn't drive him, if he was of a different opinion. He's our representative man in Tavvydale—we pick him out to do the wrestling in the Cornish matches; he's so clever at the kicking."

"Ah! I remember. You kick in Devonshire?"

"When we're hurt, especially," was the dry response.

"Are you a Deyonshire man, Captain?"

"Yes—born in Tavvydale, too; and though I have wandered many thousands of miles away from it, here I am once more, and settled down for good. I've made up my mind not to go five miles from it again."

"A rash resolution, which may be altered by circumstances, Athorpe."

"Not that," said Athorpe, confidently; "I never found much comfort out of Devon; I should feel going wrong—going back to all the harm from which I have escaped—if I left Tavvydale. So I stop, sir, for ever!"

He stamped his foot upon the ground, to give force to his assertion; and judging by the hard expression of his face, it seemed possible that nothing could take him from his birthplace, or was likely to shake for an instant the resolution he had formed. And yet he spoke rashly and untruly, as men confident in a future that is hidden from them always speak.

"And here's Milly," he added, coming up with our heroine, who, in her cotton dress, stout shoes, and flapping bonnet, was well disguised enough, until she turned her smiling and blushing face towards them at her uncle's salutation. She curtsied again to Laurence—an act of deference on her part that made Laurence blush in his turn, although he had almost grown accustomed to the reverence of the peasantry by this time.

Milly had been walking very rapidly towards the mine, and with a brighter colour on her cheeks, looked prettier than ever.

"You did not take a holiday to-day, Milly," said her uncle; "that's a good girl, who knows her duty too well to shirk it. What's 'that old frog going to do all day to amuse himself?"

Laurence noticed that the colour deepened still more on Milly's cheeks.

"Uncle James, you mean," said Milly; "oh! he will amuse himself very well till I return this evening—a little contents him and makes him happy."

"I suppose he'll fish in the stream there. It's a fine day for it."

"I don't think that he likes fishing—he gets low-spirited over it, he says."

"He's not always in the best of spirits. A fortnight in the Cleft, Mr. Raxford, generally floors him—he left here three years ago more of an idiot than he came."

"It's a great change from town—and he's so much alone here. I—I thought of asking to-day for a week's leave, Mr. Raxford," she said, looking at Laurence for the first time.

"No—I won't have that," interposed Athorpe; "you must not spend a whole week in idleness—losing money, too, at your age, with health and strength to work for it."

"He's getting old, and needs companionship," said Milly; "and he has been always like yourself—a good friend, and very dear to me. I don't see much of him, and I—I know that he's happy enough when I am with him. Why, I make him happy!"

"He should know how to amuse himself without taking up your time," grumbled Athorpe; "I don't see the use of it—it's sheer waste, Milly."

"I shall make up for lost time—I always do that," cried Milly; "and I haven't had a holiday this year yet. But if you really think it kind to let him keep there by himself—just as lonely as you were before Aunt Inez came home and I had gone back to the Cleft—why, I'll—I'll not ask for leave."

"Your uncle can't think that, Milly," said Laurence; "that's not like him, and so the holiday is granted."

"She must ask Captain Peters, who's the surface captain, and he'll lay it before Waters, who'll

knock off ten shillings for it—that's the rules. You must not interfere over people's heads, young man, for it isn't a partner's business, and makes enemies."

"Very well," laughed Laurence; "but they shan't knock the ten shillings off, at any rate."

"Yes, they shall," jerked forth the uncle; "if we don't do our work, we can't take any money. I think, Milly" he added, with a short laugh, "we are independent enough for that."

"Yes, sir, to be sure," cried Milly, flushing again; "it's very kind of you, Mr. Raxford, but I—I don't want ten shillings. No—it's only the holiday—a week's sunshine in the Cleft for Uncle James."

"Milly *is* independent, you see. Well she may be, with money in the bank like her uncle. So much money, that all the young fellows are running after her, Mr. Raxford, and pretending that it is for her good looks. Why, she has saved ——"

"Ah! what with my little savings and the money which my uncle banked in my name on his marriage-day, I'm quite an heiress!" cried Milly.

"If she didn't waste so much money on books—though I don't mind her reading books—if she didn't set up for a geni—*us*, Mr. Raxford."

"Ah! now you are going to speak ill of me, and I am only fond of your praises, like a selfish niece as I am. I'll not hear any more—I'll run and coax Captain Peters before the rest begin to tease him."

Milly darted away, and Captain Athorpe turned with a grim smile upon his world-beaten face.

"Spoilt a little—fond of her own way more than a little—but really a good girl."

"Doubtless," asserted Laurence.

"And a clever girl, too; though I sneer at her outlandish ways, just to keep her down a bit. You'd never guess what a lot that girl has taught herself, or how she works night after night at all kinds of studies that can't be any good to *her*. She's proud, you know; and though it's objectionable at times—and aggravating," he added, his brow furrowing as though a disagreeable reminiscence had shot across it, "still it's right to have a good opinion of one's self, and it keeps *her* right. Why, here she is again."

"Oh! uncle, I have forgotten to ask a favour of you!" cried Milly, returning as quickly as she had departed.

"What favour?"

"That you will not be angry with me for lending your violin to Uncle James—I told him that he might call for it if he was dull to-day without me."

"That's cool, at any rate," said Athorpe; "how do I know whether he can play it, or whether he won't break it. You might have told him to call to-morrow, and not have taken French leave with *my* property."

"Ah! you'll not be cross about that, Uncle Noll," cried Milly; "you never play now, and he must practise, poor gentleman! Aunt Inez will let him have it when he tells her who he is, and why he has come."

"If she believes him," said Athorpe. "Well, mind, if he breaks the thing, he must pay for it. I never liked lending anything!"

"Especially an ornament like that, uncle," said Milly archly; "a saffron fiddle, with a wreath of buttercups carved on it."

"There, be off, you hussy. You have some of old Whiteshell's impudence this morning as well as your own, or you're trying to show off a little before the master here."

"Oh! uncle," and Milly hurried away now in

real earnest, and was seen no more by Captain Athorpe that morning.

Meanwhile Mr. Whiteshell was already thinking of Captain Athorpe's violin as a means of distraction until Milly's return. After his niece's departure, he had closed the door of the cottage behind him, and skipped down the green slope to the path along which he had forced his way with Laurence Raxford yesternight. Turning from the direction of Captain Athorpe's cottage, he had sauntered, with his hands behind him, still further up the Cleft, following the turnings, windings, ascents, and declines of the path before him, and not paying a great deal of attention to the beauty around him, the wondrous wealth of picturesqueness which at every step revealed a new feature of light and shade, and colour. A wild and striking loveliness about this Wind-Whistle Cleft—a loveliness all its own, distinct in features from a Devonshire valley, a Welsh glen, or a Cumberland mountain pass, and yet possessing the attributes of all three allied to its own originality. Narrow, confined, and tortuous this Cleft in most parts; a place where the wind found considerable difficulties in escaping, and moaned strangely in its efforts at times, there-

by accounting for the appellation which had clung to it for more generations than we wot of. Shut in by hills on either side—hills clothed with every form of verdure—hills, rugged, bare, and frowning, from which the verdure had slipped below the path, and formed an undercliff ending with the stream; and hills from which shot a very forest of trees, all gnarled and twisted in their efforts to catch the light, or to escape the wind. On a dull day the place was dark enough, but on so bright a morning as this, following last night's storm, it seemed like an entrance into Paradise. The sun's rays were struggling through the foliage to gild the stream below; there was a gentle fluttering of every leaf with the soft breeze astir there; and every bird of song in Devon seemed to have fluttered to the Cleft that morning, intoxicated with joy and harmony.

All this did not suggest itself to Mr. White-shell; he was a man who regarded the Cleft lugubriously, and had not a love for the country in his heart. The sudden change from his own home had not had that beneficial effect common to total changes; he evidently breathed no freer for the contrast everything presented to Milk Street,

—a close and dirty locality, abutting upon Tothill Street, Westminster—he was a man who loved town, and clung to its associations.

“I *never* saw such a place as this is,” he groaned to himself; “it makes one very miserable.”

He stood deliberating with himself as to the expediency of proceeding further up the Cleft, shook his head, relieved himself by a heavy sigh, and retraced his steps to the cottage, taking the key from his pocket and unlocking the door cautiously.

“The simplest thing in the world to have got in here during my absence and robbed the house; and then have waited till I came back to finish the job by cutting my throat. It’s all very well for Milly to say that nothing of the kind happens in Devon—strange things happen everywhere.”

Mr. Whiteshell looked round him, assured himself that the place was as he had left it, sat down and tried to find a book that would suit him from Milly’s store in the recess, gave up the attempt, and emerged into the Cleft again, locking up as before.

“To think that a man fond of society should ever come here for a change!” he muttered, by way of self-reproach, as he set off again, this time

in the direction that Laurence and Captain Athorpe had taken last night. He had Captain Athorpe's violin on his mind now; he was partial to the violin, and somewhat clever with the instrument, and his objections to the mining captain were not so strong as his anxiety for a little musical distraction on his own account.

But after two or three hundred yards' progression, he brought himself to a full stop again, and stood in his favourite and Napoleonic attitude, with his hands behind him, looking on the ground.

"I don't see," he said, throwing his head back suddenly, and drawing himself up, as we novelists have it, to his full height—which thus drawn out was exactly five feet two, "I don't see why I should ask a favour in that quarter, and perhaps have it refused me. If the wife is anything like the husband, I shall only find myself insulted. No, I don't see it."

Not seeing it, after this grave deliberation, Mr. Whiteshell changed his tactics, and slid with considerable celerity, like a fawn in a shabby suit of black, from the path to the very edge of the stream—a stream fretting, murmuring, and foaming against the many obstacles in its way. It

had been at war with the hills that hemmed it in from times remote to all men. It had fought its way like truth, and found its way like it to the broad, peaceful haven ; but it had fought hard and well, and had still to fight occasionally. In the winter months the hills dislodged yet huge pieces of rock, that had been long threatening to fall, and hurled them at the stream, which for awhile, half blocked in its career, disturbed by opposition, paused to gather force, to swell with its restraint, and then glide round it, making a new way for itself, but for ever afterwards, as in resentment, to murmur a reproach at each intrusion on its quiet life. Rocks and islets, with the trees growing on them still, here and there, with the trees broken down, and falling across the water, where they whitened, and became moss-stained and lichen-covered—altogether as disturbed and blocked a mountain stream as ever gave beauty to an English valley. Mr. Whiteshell picked out a boulder of a few tons weight that had missed a watery grave by an inch or two, and after spreading a silk handkerchief thereon, gave a spring, took a seat, drew his knees up to a level with his chin, and clasped a pair of thin bony hands round them.

"Perhaps some one will come to fish presently, and then I can talk to him—or a maniacal artist, or a tourist, or a something."

Mr. Whiteshell waited almost patiently for these objects of interest, looking at the water and its rock-strewn bed meanwhile, wondering if the fish found it inconvenient to turn so many corners, and then suddenly doubting if there were any fish at all there.

"I never saw a fish—not even a stickleback," he said, disparagingly. "I expect it's not lively enough here, even for fish!"

Mr. Whiteshell seemed inclined that morning to burst into little soliloquies, or it was an invariable habit of his to think aloud. Still nursing his knees, and presenting a grotesque appearance in the landscape, he said, his thoughts evidently reverting to Milly—

"I hope she'll obtain her holiday. That will make it more amusing for me—and she promised, whenever I came again, that I shouldn't be low-spirited. She's very good—and I'm very selfish—but I hope she'll get her leave. That Mr. Raxford won't like to say No, after eating so much of Milly's bread and cheese."

Then he must have continued to think of Mr. Raxford, for presently he said, nodding his head at the water, which was his only confidant—

“I don’t know that I ever met with a man I liked so much. He put himself a good deal out of the way to oblige James Whiteshell, and so James likes that man.”

That being fully accounted for to the satisfaction of the speaker, he thought very naturally of Captain Athorpe, who had looked in to inquire the reason of the noise at Milly’s cottage; and then finally he came round again to Captain Athorpe’s violin.

“I think I’ll just call and put the question delicately,” he said; “I’d rather ask Mrs. Athorpe—I’d rather ask the devil,” he added irreverently, “than that crab-apple of a man—that ill-mannered incongruity. A more uncivilized, unpolished, disrespectful, objectionable, three-cornered wretch, than Captain Athorpe—Captain, indeed!—I never met in all my life. I don’t say, Milly,” he went on, as though Milly was by his side, and had entered a protest against his verdict, “that your uncle Athorpe hasn’t a good trait of character; but as it is no business of mine, as I don’t

want to see it, and should have to put up with all his bad traits before I got to it, or understood it, why, let him keep it to himself."

It relieved Mr. Whiteshell, this imaginary dialogue. Milly never cared to hear Uncle James's opinion of Uncle Oliver, but always checked it, and endeavoured to turn the conversation; therefore it was pleasant to speak out for once, all that was in his thoughts, though he had no listeners but the rustling trees which shadowed him, and the water rushing and rippling round the boulder on which he was heaped.

"Aren't you dead yet?" he quoted from Captain Athorpe's last night's address to him. "What a greeting to put to a man whom he had not seen for three years, come next July. I'll not borrow a violin from such a man as that!"

Mr. Whiteshell grew very red in the face, whilst brooding over the indignity that had been offered him—he was a man who stood upon his dignity, and plumed himself upon the courtesy of his address to others. There was an odd, old-fashioned gentility about the man, born of his profession, that elicited amongst his London neighbours a certain amount of respect

towards him, and rendered the incivility of Captain Athorpe more apparent.

"I've come a long way, and spent a good deal, to be insulted like this," he said, "just because he's saved a little money, too. I won't have his fiddle. Where's my handkerchief, I wonder!"

The old gentleman, depressed in spirits by his late indignities, or the solitariness of the Cleft, found tears in his eyes, and wished to wipe them away. But the handkerchief was not in any of his pockets, and was not discovered till he rose to go away, when he remembered that he had been sitting on it all the time.

"I have got the horrors stopping here," he said; "I'll try another walk. I knew I should get them in this place—I said so last night—I always catch them. It's a miserable locality—not a living creature within a mile, I'd wager a sixpence."

He climbed up to the path again, examined his boots, which were muddy now by reason of his excursion to lower ground where the last night's rain had settled, tried one sole by touching it with his hand, evidently possessed by the grave doubt that he had been reckless with his shoe-leather, and then went on again in the direction of uncle Oliver's

cottage. Half way from home, Mr. Whiteshell was relieved by the sight of a living and reasoning being, sauntering idly in his direction, swinging a roll of paper in his hand.

"Here's a gentleman out for pleasure, poor thing," said Whiteshell, "I'll take the liberty of bidding him good morning. It may be a relief to him to hear a fellow-creature's voice."

Mr. Whiteshell brightened up at the prospect of society, and as the gentleman approached, raised his hat in that formal and stiff-backed way, which had already astonished Laurence Raxford. The gentleman raised his in return, responded to Mr. Whiteshell's good morning, looked somewhat hard at him, and then gave vent to the extremely English interjection of "Hollo!"

Mr. Whiteshell stopped at this sign of recognition, but failed to call to mind the features of the gentleman confronting him.

"Really—I have not the pleasure," he said politely. "I don't think that it is possible in such a hole—place, to be recognized by anybody, simply for the reason that nobody thinks of coming here."

"I never forget faces. Your name is Whiteshell, and you used to live in Milk Street, West-

minster. I was in Westminster five or six years ago, making inquiries about a new Ragged School there. You were good enough to assist me with a great deal of information."

"Whiteshell—not 'smell,'" corrected the gentleman addressed, before replying to the latter part of the preceding remark. "Quite right, sir—I have had the pleasure of a fleeting acquaintance with you. I was struck—very much struck with your energy and arguments—so young a man interesting himself in so good a cause. But," was the dry rejoinder "we never got the schools, sir."

Mr. Engleton took off his hat, and ran his gloved hand through his wiry hair.

"No, not yet, you haven't," he said, a trifle disturbed by Mr. Whiteshell's peroration. "A parcel of fellows, parsons, and those sorts of men, wanted to form a committee, and shut me out of the management—to object to half my ideas, as unnecessary, profane, revolutionary, and all that bosh. And I worked very hard, too, to bring the thing about."

"I think, sir, that that idea of yours concerning dancing—teaching our poor, ragged bits of humanity a little of the graces of life, as well as its

sternest lessons, an idea bordering upon genius."

"Dancing? Oh! yes, it was a good idea," said Mr. Engleton, complacently; "but of course everybody objected—everybody always does. But upon my honour, now I come to think of it, I'm very sorry if, in any way, I raised hopes of a situation for yourself. I was premature in my ideas—my own enthusiasm carried me away, in fact, and possibly embarrassed others with myself."

"Well, I *was* a little hopeful," confessed Mr. Whiteshell, "for you spoke as though it was all settled. But when you never favoured Milk Street with your presence again, I, being a bit of a philosopher, and used to disappointments, did not grieve much."

"That's right, old man," said Engleton cheerfully—"that's true philosophy. I intended to have written an apology to you, but it slipped my memory."

"Pray don't mention it," said Mr. Whiteshell, raising his hat at the intended compliment. "An apology was neither required nor expected, sir."

"If in any way you were—anything out of pocket," suggested Mr. Engleton.

"Which I was not—which complaint has not been

my misfortune hitherto," said Mr. Whiteshell with becoming dignity. "I am a man in a humble walk of life, sir, but I pay my way, and can afford now and then to take my tour in Devonshire, you see."

"Indeed. I'm glad to hear that. I should like all the poor in London to have their tour once a year," said Engleton enthusiastically—"to get up monster excursion trains, and float themselves for a day or two into the pure air, and sunshine. I have had this idea some time. If we could obtain a few thousands of generous contributors, now, it might be carried out to some extent."

"I should be happy to add my subscription," remarked Mr. Whiteshell, rather pained to think that his appearance had suggested the idea of poverty taking its holiday, and desirous of disabusing Mr. Engleton's mind of that impression as speedily as possible.

"Oh, thank you," said Mr. Engleton, surprised by this reply. "We must consider this project presently."

"An artist, I presume, sir?" said Mr. Whiteshell, with a glance at the roll of paper in Mr. Engleton's hand.

"Not at all," was the reply. "I'm sketching out a little ground-plan for a row or two of cottages in this Cleft. I'm looking for an eligible site."

"A row or two of cottages!" cried Mr. Whiteshell. "Ah! that would be a blessing, and no mistake. Some chance of society then."

"If I could only find an eligible site. How far does this Cleft extend, Mr. Whiteshell?"

"The Lord knows! I've never been to the end of it. The further you go, the more awful it is—that's all that I can say."

"Awful! I never met with a more beautiful spot."

"Spots depend upon taste," said Mr. Whiteshell; "if you're fond of damp grass, it's a splendid place."

"You know that girl's cottage, half a mile further on, I suppose," said Engleton, leaning his back against a tree springing out from the rock, an action imitated by Mr. Whiteshell, whose heart leaped at these signs of a long stay in his propinquity."

"That girl being my niece," replied Mr. Whiteshell, "and that cottage being my resting-place for the next fortnight, I should think I did."

"Oh! indeed," said Mr. Engleton; "well, there's a site in that quarter, if I can persuade Mr. Fyvie to allow it to be built upon. Are you at all handy at plans?"

"Not what may be called a first-rate hand," evasively answered Mr. Whiteshell, who had never had a plan before him in his life.

"You know what small-roomed houses are, and how poor people swarm in them, irrespective of health, decency, or anything else?" said Mr. Engleton warmly. "Now look here, Mr. Whiteshell. This, I take it, is an improvement."

Mr. Engleton unrolled his ground-plan—an outline sketch or diagram, with little dabs of pink and blue in divers places, which caught the eye of Mr. Whiteshell at once, who asked what they meant.

"I'll tell you, if you'll be quiet a moment," said Engleton; and then the two went into the subject, Mr. Whiteshell not at all interested, but clinging to the expounder for company's sake. A spice of selfishness in the old gentleman's character has already been remarked; here it appeared again after its odd fashion.

Mr. Engleton, a shrewd young man in his way, very quickly perceived Mr. Whiteshell's lack of

interest, or knowledge, and rolled up his sketch again. He was going further up the Cleft to make a few measurements, and Mr. Whiteshell did not volunteer his services—in fact, was thinking of the Athorpe violin again, and whether it would not be better company than this reformer.

“May I ask you, sir, before you resume your highly important studies, whether you are acquainted with Captain Athorpe—or have taken any notice of Captain Athorpe’s cottage at the opening of the Cleft?” asked Whiteshell.

“The cottage I know—Captain Athorpe I do not.”

“May I trouble you again?—may I venture to ask if you have observed the lady at that cottage?”

“Yes, I have—what of her?”

“Does it strike you,” speaking more confidentially, “that she is a bad temper—irascible—a woman who would—who would snap a man up with hard words, for instance?”

Engleton laughed.

“Why—have you a favour to ask, Mr. Whiteshell?”

“It may be considered a favour, certainly,” an-

swered the other. "I ask it in my niece's name, not in mine, of course."

"Well, I don't think that you need fear," said Engleton. "She is young and foreign-looking. I think I remember knocking at the house you mention for the loan of a pencil, to replace one which I had lost on my way, and it was proffered me very gracefully by Mrs. Athorpe."

"That's a good sign—you were a stranger, I suppose?"

"Quite a stranger."

"That looks very well," asserted Mr. Whiteshell, taking in another button of his coat, and pulling his hat firmly over his brows. "I thank you," he said, taking his hat off the instant afterwards in salutation; "you relieve my mind, for I cannot face discourtesy in any shape. It upsets me."

"Good morning," said Engleton, feeling compelled to raise his hat in return, and rather annoyed by this elaborate formality.

"A moment, sir!" cried his companion. "Will you allow me to hazard one more inquiry? That pencil—was it returned?"

Engleton gave a fillip to his ear with his rolled-up plan.

"N—no, it wasn't. I quite forgot it. I am afraid I have a bad habit of forgetting things."

Mr. Whiteshell remembered the Westminster Ragged School, with the dancing accompaniment, and inwardly coincided with Mr. Engleton.

"If you have a spare pencil in stock, it might be a little introduction," suggested Mr. Whiteshell.

"Upon my word, you are as frightened of the ladies as I am!" cried Engleton, "but—unfortunately, I have but one pencil with me."

"No matter," said Mr. Whiteshell coolly; "I'll take your apologies for the omission, if you have no objection. Sir, I have the honour to wish you a good morning."

Hats elevated again, and then the gentlemen proceeded their separate ways—the elder one tripping along with considerable agility until within sight of Captain Athorpe's cottage, when he came to a full stop, and reconsidered the question.

"I don't think I'll ask for the violin after all," he said aloud; "it's an old thing, and very much out of order, I know. Why should I expose myself to the humiliation of a refusal from an Athorpe?"

He seemed to decide the question by turning his

back upon the cottage, then it was once more reconsidered—bringing Mr. Whiteshell to another full stop.

“Still I don’t see it, if I require relaxation in the place—and it would be a pleasure to Milly to hear me play, and I might teach her a fashionable dance or two before I left the Cleft. Because these Athorpes have saved up a paltry hundred pounds or two, are they so much better than I, or has it made their blood equal in purity to mine? Here goes!”

Mr. Whiteshell wheeled round and went off at a rapid pace, straight ahead this time, waiting for no man, and no man’s resolution; proceeding onwards with a very red face, and looking fiercely behind his bushy white moustache. The click of the latch of the garden-gate did not deter him, neither did a vigorous application of the little brass knocker make his heart sink. He was prepared for the worst, but he hoped for the fiddle.

The door was opened, not by the small servant on this occasion, but by Mrs. Athorpe herself.

Mr. Whiteshell raised his hat.

“Madam, my name is Whiteshell. I have

taken the liberty to——Inez!—Good God!—is it Inez Bouquiéné?”

“Hush!” cried Mrs. Athorpe. “I did not think to see you—I had hoped——Come in, sir, and let me ask you to be merciful and silent, for an old friend’s sake.”

“Merciful!” repeated the dancing-master, vaguely, as he followed her into the sitting-room—the best room—of Captain Athorpe’s grand house.

CHAPTER X.

OLD FRIENDS.

MRS. ATHORPE dropped into a corner of the substantial couch, and wringing her hands silently together, looked down at the carpet; Mr. Whiteshell, with his own hands clasped together also, took a seat facing her, and looked intently—almost pathetically—into the face averted from him.

“To think that I should find you—you of all women—in this house—of all houses in the world!”

“Yes, it is strange,” she murmured; “but I have been waiting for this discovery, expecting it, and praying against it. You will not be hard with me?”

“It is no business of mine—it is not my nature to be hard with anybody,” replied the dancing-master.

“I have settled down here for good—for very

good, I hope, old friend," she said, almost coaxingly, "and am doing my best to make everybody happy. Mr. Whiteshell, I have succeeded—I have learned to understand myself better since I saw you last."

"Ah! the last time we met you came to me, a wretched girl, for advice; you were greatly troubled, and I did my best to talk to you as to a daughter whom I loved, to warn you of the folly and danger of a new companionship. But, Inez, you were wilful, and had your own way; I could only pray that you might see your error before it was too late."

"I did," cried Inez, quickly, "and I was saved. I did not forget your warning—the warning of the dear old master who had been ever kind to his little Inez, his favourite pupil, his daughter—and salvation came, just as you prayed it would. There was no harm—oh! Mr. Whiteshell, there was never any harm from the beginning to the end. My pride stood my friend as well as you, and there really was no harm!"

With every reiteration of this statement, she looked eagerly into the face of her companion, and at every protestation held her hands towards

him, imploring, as it were, that he should trust her words. As he still looked at her with that strange, perplexed, and pitying look, which altered not at her appeal, she became more agitated and solicitous.

"I was very young and very vain, but my heart was strong, old friend," she cried. "Fond of admiration, and of the applause that came to me night after night, and made me giddy, but always on my guard, remembering the fate of many like me, and seeing many sink away from right without an effort of their own. If the temptation came to me in my turn, why, I was stronger, and knew better, and however the envious might rail against me, I was still strong in self-defence. There was no harm from beginning to end—no harm, James Whiteshell, so help me God! There, you will believe me now."

"Yes, I believe you. I am very glad. But the man——"

"When it came to the parting with him, and he faced me with his duplicity and craft, I flung him off, and never spoke to him again."

"Where is he now, poor girl?"

"Abroad—some people say dead. I don't care which myself."

"I should think not, now," said Whiteshell; "you are the wife of Captain Athorpe, of Wheal Desperation. I always thought that you would make a good and cheerful little wife, but I never dreamed that, sobering down, and setting aside all girlish vanities, you would have chosen a man so opposite to yourself in everything. Are you happy?"

"Very!"

"He is kind to you, then?" asked Whiteshell, doubtfully.

"He is very kind—for he has every confidence in me."

"I am glad to hear that—if I am surprised," he added, his old dislike to Captain Athorpe peering out here despite him, "I rejoice none the less at your assertion. And he knows all?"

"He knows nothing," she answered, sinking her voice to a whisper. "I met with him in France, where I had flown from temptation, and he took pity on my loneliness; and full of trust in him, my mother's friend, I promised to become his wife."

"But your stage life, have you told him anything of that?"

"No. He would not have married me if I had. He had a horror of plays and players, engendered

by a past acquaintance with them; he had seen much of the world's evil; he was almost sceptical of any good when I first knew him. But he became very generous and noble—we did not marry in haste—and I thought it was worth a struggle to win him, and do my best to make his home and life happy. Until to-day, thank God, I have succeeded—now you come, and I can't see my way.”

“Do you think that I would betray you?” asked Whiteshell, reproachfully. “I would only advise you again, Inez, to your own good.”

“Well?” she said inquiringly.

“I would tell him all, I think.”

“You do not know what a hard, suspicious man he is,” she said, “how uncharitable to every one but me, how different from every man whom I have met, how unforgiving of a wrong or a deceit, however innocent, or for his own benefit, deception might have been. We are both happy now; let us keep so to the end.”

“He is certainly eccentric,” mused Mr. Whiteshell. “You are right, perhaps, though I don't advise you, understand, to secrecy. I never liked secrets; they always explode at the wrong time, and cover everybody with ignominy.”

"You will not tell him anything—you will not come here, or, coming here, profess to have known me before to-day? That is all I ask of you, my old master, friend, and father."

She leaned towards him, and took his withered hands in hers. The dark eyes were full of tears, but the face was expressive of more hope now.

"I promise that," he murmured.

"And you will not tell that girl?" she cried, eagerly.

"What girl?" asked Mr. Whiteshell.

"That Milly at the Cleft. She is very quick, and a chance word would give her the clue to my humiliation. She does not love me in her heart, and might be glad of——;

"Hush! hush! Mrs. Athorpe. This is the old jealousy, which you have not got rid of with the new life—which has been always in the way. You don't like Milly?"

"Yes, I do," she answered, petulantly. "I like her for herself—I like her because *he* likes her, because she is earnest and true; but she is not kind and loving to me, her uncle's wife. She is not what I expected."

"In all my life," asserted Mr. Whiteshell, "I

never met with a girl so good, so pure, and so unselfish !”

“ You think so now ?—you thought so once of me, when I was your favourite.”

“ But Milly——”

“ Oh ! Milly is very good in her way,” said Mrs Athorpe, carelessly ; “ I know nothing against her, except her odd pride in herself, and in that uncomfortable home of hers. And we agree together pretty well, and after all *I* love her. When do you leave the Cleft ?”

“ In a fortnight.”

Mrs. Athorpe sighed. It was a long holiday—a long time to wait before she could breathe freely. Mr. Whiteshell noticed the look, and was quick to reply thereto.

“ You are sorry that I leave no earlier—you don’t trust me, Inez.”

“ Don’t say ‘ Inez ’ again—it may become a habit with you, and appear strange to others. No, I am not sorry—the change will do you good, and *I can* trust you.”

“ Yes, you can.”

“ I heard that you were at the Cleft last night,” she said ; “ and have been fearful of this meeting.

Now my heart is at rest, and I am glad."

"That's well. And I'm glad, too, girl," he replied; "for I find you mistress of a comfortable home, and anxious to remain so. All the old caprice, the flightiness, shall we call it, and the little vanities subdued—or gone?"

"Gone," said Mrs. Athorpe; "I have settled down!"

"That's well," he said again; "that's very well."

"Hush! now. Here is my servant coming back from Tavvydale, and I am Captain Athorpe's wife, who is in doubt still as to the reasons for your coming here."

"I called with Milly's love, to borrow your husband's violin," explained Mr. Whiteshell; "Milly thought that it would amuse me whilst she was away. Do you think that an objection would be urged in *any* quarter, now?"

"Not any," said Mrs. Athorpe, taking the violin down from the wall; "it is an old-fashioned instrument enough; and my husband never plays it—it is in good hands at last."

With a grace that was evidently inborn, Inez Athorpe placed it in the hands of the old dancing-master, whose face brightened up at her praise.

"Ah! if it hadn't been for so many years of jig-tunes, I might have been a professor, and earned my ten guineas a night at solos," he said, with a sigh, as he turned the violin over in his hands; "but I was content with quadrilles and galops, and was never particularly ambitious. You remember——"

"No, no—I remember nothing, Mr. Whiteshell!" she cried; "and you—have you forgotten?"

"True. I am corrected. Who was that came into the house just now?"

"My servant."

"Keeping a real servant, too!—well, I congratulate you—and happy with Captain Athorpe—why, I shall think better of *him* after this. What an excessively ugly violin this is, to be sure!"

Mrs. Athorpe laughed very merrily at this. Her spirits had risen again, and she was like herself—like the Inez that Captain Athorpe had ever known.

"You must not say that, for my husband prizes it for its ugliness, or its antiquity, or something."

"Not choosing his violins on the same principle that he has chosen his wife," said Mr. Whiteshell, quite gallantly; "there, you see that I am still a courtier, In——"

"Yes, yes. And you will go now, Mr. White-shell. God bless you for your confidence in me—for believing all that I have told you," she said, in a lower tone; "above all, for your promise to respect the motives for my silence. Now there is nothing in the world to sigh for."

"Glad to hear that, for it assures me how content you are—you, the wild, restless being that you were! Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Think of me in London now and then."

It was a hint to come no more to Captain Athorpe's cottage, and he accepted it as a hint that was worth respecting, for the sake of her future relations with a man whom she had more or less deceived.

He took his departure somewhat thoughtfully, with the violin under his arm, and the bow swinging between his finger and thumb. Truth was stranger than fiction; and it was very strange that the girl in whom he had been deeply interested years ago—who had vanished away from his life like a dream-figure—should start up amongst the Devonshire hills, the wife of the very man he most objected to, and who seemed, to his

imagining, the man the most unsuited for her, of all creation. He, stern and hard, and unpolished, and she fretful, capricious, vain, and childlike; and yet happy together, those two. It *was* strange!

She was capricious certainly; he would have thought so still, could he have seen her after his departure. The ordeal had been passed successfully, and she was safe, and luxuriating in her safety. Sufficient for the day had been the evil thereof; the weight off her mind, she felt free as the air again, and happy as the birds that dart through it. She opened the piano in one corner of the room, and dashed off into a light waltz tune, singing the while; she closed the piano, but continued to sing as she moved about the room; she was humming softly the same tune when she stood on tiptoe on the hearth-rug smiling at herself in the glass above the mantel-shelf, and congratulating herself on her good looks, as well as her good fortune.

Half an hour afterwards, the April nature of the woman had changed again; and she was lying on the couch, face downwards, with her hands before her face, weeping silently and bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.

CROSS-QUESTIONING.

MR. WHITESHELL, still in a ruminative mood, proceeded towards the house in the Cleft. Within the last hour had arisen a distraction from the thoughts engendered by his solitude, and he gave way to it as he wandered homewards with a step less light than usual. He had the day before him—the day all to himself in the Cleft—and there was no occasion for haste. When he reached the tree against which he had set his back to talk with Mr. Engleton, he assumed the old position, raised the violin absently to his shoulder, and gave two or three dismal scrapes across the strings with the bow.

“Poor girl—or lucky girl, it’s very doubtful which,” he said. “I have always called her poor girl, until to-day—little thinking of the escape which

she had had. Lucky girl to be Oliver Athorpe's wife—hum!—it's not a nice berth, take it all together, but still lucky for her. So we let the past between us float away with less noise than that suicidal stream below there—and of all the wretched instruments of music that have ever been in my hands, this is the worst and harshest. I'd back a sixpenny fiddle from a toyshop to possess more harmony than this thing. It's like its master, every inch of it," he grumbled ungratefully; "and to carve all this rubbish on its wainscot back, too."

Another scrape or two, and then a burst of musical laughter in his ears, followed by a clapping of hands.

"There, now he is happy," cried Milly; "quite at home, even in Wind-Whistle Cleft."

"What, you at home, too, Milly!" cried Mr. Whiteshell brightening up. "How did you manage it?"

"Why, I asked for my holiday, and it was granted at once," said Milly. "This day into the bargain, somehow."

"Somehow!" repeated her uncle.

"Yes. I think Mr. Raxford arranged it,

though I did not ask him, or expect a favour from him. That is the worst of gentlefolk, uncle."

"What is the worst?"

"They don't like to be indebted to us even for shelter from the rain, without making a return. Captain Peters told me at twelve o'clock that I need not wait any longer, and I am almost sure Mr. Raxford spoke to Captain Peters."

"Very kind of Mr. R. He's the only good-tempered native I have seen yet in Devonshire. Everybody's cross here—I suppose it's the cider."

"Why, did you ever see me cross?"

"Ah! you're the exception to the general rule, sauce-box," said Mr. Whiteshell; "who was thinking of you, do you think?"

"What else have you had to think of except your spoilt Milly?" asked our heroine.

"One or two things; it has not been an uneventful day," said Mr. Whiteshell thoughtfully.

"And you had the courage after all to secure the violin?" she said as they wended their way back to the cottage; "well, my aunt did not frighten you very much, I hope?"

"Not much," responded he.

"Was she kind to you—really?"

"Isn't she always kind, then?" asked Mr. Whiteshell quickly.

"A little variable at times," said Milly, "but soon turned by a word to be kind—that's the best of Aunt Inez. But," looking down grave and thoughtful, "I wish she liked me with all her heart, just as other people do."

"Conceited minx to fancy so," cried Mr. Whiteshell; "who are the other people, Milly?"

"Oh! everybody," she said, laughing; "I don't know why—I don't ask them why—I don't deserve it. I'm a vain, conceited, stuck-up, ignorant, pert young woman."

"Mercy on us, what a criticism!" exclaimed her uncle, "and you look as grave as if you believed it yourself."

"So I do," she replied; "and that is why I don't deserve so much affection from my friends. I'm above my station, and full of grand ideas—such funny ones at times, turning my poor head round and round anyhow! Some of them down in Tavvydale see that well enough, and yet they have the courage to love me all the same. Isn't that wonderful?"

Mr. Whiteshell chuckled at the look of surprise, the round eyes and pursed up mouth of Milly Athorpe.

"Truly surprising," he said, however; "and you believe in everybody's love for you except in your aunt's, then?"

"Oh! I did not say that aunt disliked me," cried Milly; "I don't believe that. I have fancied more than once that I haven't judged her fairly and honestly, but still I have thought—now and then—that she hasn't been exactly kind to me."

"What made you think so?"

"I don't know—I can't say—I'm a poor little girl without a reason to offer. I try to make her like me, and Uncle Oliver long ago made me promise to like her, which I do."

"With all *your* heart?" asked Mr. Whiteshell.

"Yes, with all my heart," she answered confidently.

"She agrees with your uncle Oliver?" said her companion, as they went up the slope towards the cottage.

"Yes, and makes uncle's life bright. She's a merry little thing, and can play the piano and dance like a real lady. I wish I could dance—I

feel as if I ought to dance in the very gladness of my independence in this dear old home."

"It is a home to dance for," said Mr. Whiteshell ironically as he passed into the cottage, removed his hat, and sat down heavily in the first chair by the door, "but you shall dance in it for all that before I leave the Cleft, Milly."

"We will have rare fun whilst you are here, uncle, for this is my holiday as well as yours," she said; "we'll be as happy and as busy as my bees outside."

"Ah! those beastly bees," said Mr. Whiteshell, "I can't go near them by twenty yards but what they fly at me. You have actually got another hive, too, I see."

"To be sure—each hive's a little fortune to your Milly. They buy all my honey at the great house, uncle."

"Very kind of them—I wish they'd buy the bees," he said.

"Something has put you out this morning, sir," said Milly, pausing to regard her uncle more attentively; "you are always sharp and hard when anything has disturbed you. What has happened?"

"Bless the girl—nothing," cried the alarmed relative; "I'm not sharp to-day—I've spent a charming morning; seen all the scenery, been down by the stream there, sitting on a damp rock building up my castles and my rheumatism, bit by bit, my dear. But there, lay the dinner cloth while I tune up your uncle's violin, and give you an idea of the music fashionable in town, and on all the barrel organs."

Mr. Whiteshell began fiddling away at once—darting into all kinds of street melodies—operatic selections of old times, when he had musical ambitions—snatches of extempore madness, quaint and dreamy, with which he became absorbed himself, forgetting time and place and listener, until the latter roused him at last by her warm commendations.

"Oh, it's very beautiful," said Milly; "how can you do it? What a lucky idea it was of mine to think of the violin!—how the holiday will pass now! Why, that's a nice instrument, after all."

"It improves upon acquaintance."

"Yes—it's like its master," said Milly archly.

"Why, you heard me in the Cleft, then?" said Mr. Whiteshell, surprised. "Now, that was too

bad, to listen to my mutterings! What else did you hear?" he asked uneasily.

"Nothing else, except your harsh and wicked verdict on my Uncle Noll. Now, for that, sir, you shall learn to love my uncle before he goes away. I have warned you already of the task that I have set myself."

"We'll say that he improves upon acquaintance, too," said Mr. Whiteshell. "I'll not be hard upon the man. I don't know him, and he don't know me. There, granted that, Milly, for I can't bear malice or hatred in my heart."

"I'm sure of that."

Mr. Whiteshell set aside his violin, tucked up his coat sleeves, rubbed one hand against the other, drew a chair towards the table, and sat down, beaming with smiles. The possession of the violin, and Milly's return home, had brightened his thoughts, and he was a very amiable relative after that, full of affection and anecdote, and presenting the best side of his character to the light. It was a cheerful little dinner-party, for Milly was delighted with her holiday, and pleased with the presence of her Uncle James, for whom she had still the child's affection. It pleased her

to see him at his ease, nodding and smiling across the table at her, and assuring her that he had never felt more happy; that he was very glad he had come to the Cleft—regardless of expense, and the complaints of a few pupils, who had begrudged him any change—to see his sister's child again. It was a duty, and, in the fulfilment of it, he was delighted now. He insisted upon the port-wine being produced, and drinking Milly's health in it, and Milly drinking his; and after two glasses of port-wine he was happier than ever.

"I really think the country is looking up a bit," he affirmed.

"Would you like to see the Cleft cascade this afternoon? After last night's rain it will be beautiful."

"Thank you. I'm not so anxious for cascades as all that," he said with a shudder. "I'll rest here till evening, at all events—and give you your first dancing lesson, Milly."

"Oh, that was only my jest. I don't think Uncle Nell would like me to learn dancing; it displeased him when Aunt Inez showed me the waltz step—and he warned me of you three years since. He thinks dancing a frivolous amusement."

"Very likely. I don't suppose that he's much of a dancer himself. But you, Milly, have a right to seize every accomplishment that turns up. You are a girl with your way to make in the world. Why, how old are you?"

"Eighteen, uncle."

"Eighteen!" said Mr. Whiteshell—"dear me, how the time flies! And I thought that I was coming down here to look after a little, lonely child, left moping in a valley. Eighteen years of age!"

Milly had cleared the dinner-table by this time, and could devote her whole attention to her uncle. She curled herself at his feet, clasped her two hands on his knees, and looked up into his furrowed face.

"Isn't it dreadful," she said, "to think that I am getting old!"

"Why, you'll be thinking of a husband, next."

Milly shook her head, and laughed. Oh! no—that was not very likely, she said.

"I don't know that," said her uncle gravely. "I have known girls younger than you get such thoughts into their heads. But then they were very forward, audacious young things, you

know—brought up with no true sense of decorum. What are you laughing at now ?”

“ Why, Uncle James, I’m afraid that I’m one of those audacious young things myself.”

“ Come, come ; we won’t have that ! You don’t mean to tell me——”

“ Yes, I do. For they made me think of being married, and of sweethearts, and of all those sorts of things—oh ! nearly two years and a half ago.”

“ Eh ?—who did—when was it ?”

“ Somebody wanted to marry me, when I wasn’t sixteen—just after your last holiday in the Cleft, when you went away low-spirited. I was quite frightened at the offer at first, but I’ve got used to being courted since, sir.”

“ I daresay you have,” said Mr. Whiteshell, pathetically, “ poor girl, so your troubles have commenced ; and people actually come all this way, and down this miserable gully, to make love to you ? Tell me about it, and rely upon a man of the world for the best advice, my niece.”

“ Well,” said Milly, in a business-like way, beginning to check off her lovers on her fingers, and looking very pretty during the enumeration,

"there was Bully Churdock began it, and——"

"Who's Bully Churdock?"

"A big goose, that minds his old mother's house on the great hill at the back here; he works at another mine amongst the Dartmoors, and, oh!" with a merry, ringing laugh, "he is so awkward, and so bashful, and so fierce to anybody else who comes this way! I daresay it was he whom Uncle Noll shot at last night, for he will play at hide-and-seek in the Cleft; and so good-tempered in his clumsy way to me, that I do pity him—there!"

And to Uncle James's amazement, the tears came suddenly to Milly's eyes, and were brushed away by an impatient hand.

"Why, Milly, dear, surely you—you have been seriously thinking of Mr. Churdock?"

"No, I haven't—not seriously," said Milly, quickly; "but I feel sorry for that big giant of a man getting me in his head and confusing his brains. He had no right to think of me, and *bother* me," she added, pettishly; "and he should have been satisfied with my 'No!' and gone away after other girls more suited to him, and that would have liked him in time—for he's not a very great stupid when you know him thoroughly, uncle. But,

oh! dear, he won't go away, and although he never teases me, and seldom speaks to me now, yet I know he's watching me, and that makes me wretched as well as himself."

"He must be a nuisance," mused Mr. Whiteshell. "I—I think that I should speak to the police—this might become serious."

Milly laughed at this.

"Why, we have only one policeman in the village, and Bully Churdock told him once that if he looked his way he'd crack him like a nut."

"What a savage!"

"But then Bully had been drinking, and it was feast-time," said Milly, "and poor Bully always takes too much at that time, and I'm afraid at others now. And that makes me cry a little, to think that perhaps I drove him to it, for I couldn't marry him!"

"I should think not," said Mr. Whiteshell; "you deserve a better fate than to become a Mrs. Bully."

"I wonder, now," said Milly, looking up again, "what is to become of me!"

"Ah! how many of us wonder like that!" said the old man, suddenly verging on the pathetic. "If

we could only look ahead and know—and be all the more miserable for knowing, most of us.”

“I shouldn’t,” was the quick reply.

“Why not?”

“I should prepare for it, if it were misfortune—teach myself with all my strength to bide the day when it would come. And if it was good fortune, why, I should be more satisfied than I am.”

“But I thought you *were* satisfied.”

“Why, so I am in my way,” said Milly, cheerily.

“I have nothing to fret about, and it is nice to be liked by everyone, after all.”

“And who else has liked you, Milly—I mean in the Bully Churdock style?” asked her uncle.

Milly re-commenced her calculations.

“There was the young man at the chapel next—you’ll see him next Sunday, when he stands up and gives out the hymns, opening his mouth like a young blackbird, uncle. It’s very wicked of me to say so, but I always think of the little birds that I feed in the spring—orphan birds, left alone in the Cleft like me.”

It was remarkable how Milly darted away, bird-like, from one subject to another—how one thought suggested another, and carried her away from the

first topic of conversation, bearing her in a sentence from grave to gay, and the reverse. Probably her lonely life in the Cleft, with but few opportunities of conversation, was partly the reason for this. The old man watching her, thought of Mrs. Athorpe at this juncture, of her variable and impulsive nature in the old days, and fancied that perhaps it *was* best for Milly to live alone in the Cleft. And yet Inez had never been like Milly; she had been more watchful of the world in which she had been cast early, more womanly and old at the age of this girl, kneeling there before him, as loving, innocent, and almost as child-like, as when he had seen her three years since. Mr. Whiteshell had his faults, but a want of affection for his niece was not amongst them. He stooped and kissed her, saying:

“Not alone, with old Whiteshell living, Milly. No more alone than he is, with you to think of in his front parlour in Milk Street. But Mr. Blackbird—what of him?”

“I did not say his name was Blackbird, uncle,” said Milly, all sunshine again; “how oddly you bring things round. His name’s Hawkins, and he has property of his own.”

"And you don't like him or his property?"

"Not at all—though he leads the singing at the chapel."

"Very good—any more of them?"

"One or two," said Milly, pouting; "who had nothing but their impudence to back them—mining people, that were good enough to think of me, but whom I could never like. Why, uncle, I feel myself too high for all of them at times, and it makes me wicked and proud. It's the books, I know—but I cannot give them up, for they are dear old friends of mine."

"Nothing like a good opinion of yourself, Milly," said Mr. Whiteshell; "I like a proud woman—not so proud of herself as of her good name, and her position in the world, wherever it is—even in a Cleft, for the matter of that."

"And Milly Athorpe has a good name, and is proud of it, and will strive all her life to keep it," cried his niece, enthusiastically; "but still," sinking her voice, and looking dreamily before her, "she wonders now and then what will become of her!"

"I hope," said Mr. Whiteshell, very gravely, "that you haven't got one idea in your head?"

"What is that?"

"That you are pretty enough, almost scholar enough, to marry a gentleman. That is the most dangerous thought—the most delusive snare—that can trouble a girl in your position, Milly. I have seen so many—so very many—build this folly up in their weak brains, until it made them fit for nothing good."

Milly coloured very much, but her eyes were not lowered from her uncle's gaze.

"I may have had a kind of dream that I knew would never come true—a dream of a HERO," Milly confessed; "but I have laughed at it myself in waking."

"There is no gentleman about here—no man calling himself a gentleman—who dares to speak to you, or to hint in any way that you are very, very pretty, Milly! No one anywhere above you in position whom you feel that you could love?"

"No one whom I could love amongst the real gentlefolk," cried Milly, lightly; "upon my honour, uncle, no. The real young gentlefolk that I have met once or twice in life," said Milly, with her red lips quivering with scorn, "have told me to my face what gentlemen they are, and how poor girls like me should flutter at their compliments,

and thank Heaven for the good looks which have lured such grandees to jest with us. No, no, amongst all of *them*, not one for Milly Athorpe—I think, Uncle James, she is too proud for that.”

“Bravo!” cried her uncle; “I think so too. Books haven’t done you any harm, if they have taught you to respect yourself, and be chary of great men’s compliments; they are the best of books that warn without ensnaring—I’ll look them over presently.”

“It is not the books now,” said Milly. “For we have gentlemen about here sometimes—at least they call themselves gentlemen, and wear black coats—and we have some foolish and vain girls, and then comes scandal in Tavvydale—undeserved sometimes.”

“Which picks out the purest for its shaft now and then—well, you are better in the Cleft than in the village, if the last’s a mischief-making place.”

“Oh! but I go down in the village to fight the battles of the falsely-accused,” said Milly; “and I have a school-class on Sundays—and we are very busy down there always.”

“A lively place occasionally,” said Mr. White-shell, drily; “villages are regular nests for fretful

gossips, and I daresay you have enough to do, if you interfere with other people's business. Give me the violin, my child, and let us change the subject."

"I don't think that I'll learn to dance," said Milly, thoughtfully; "I feel too serious to-day. Dancing in my position of life, after all, is not an accomplishment that I shall want."

"Perhaps it's as well," mused Mr. Whiteshell, taking the violin from Milly's hands. "I won't press the point; it's not worth thinking about, and you're not naturally awkward, my dear. There's a lightness and gracefulness about you that reminds me of my early days, when I was a ballet master, and earning fair wages."

He dashed into some lively dance music which the reminiscence had conjured up, and Milly sat and listened to him, gathering together her usual good spirits in the hearing, and finally seizing the tune and humming it along with him.

"That was very popular thirty years ago, Milly," he said, looking across at her.

"Any one could dance to that, if the heart was light enough," cried his niece.

"I begin to think that this is a splendid instru-

ment," remarked Mr. Whiteshell, quite enthusiastically, and still in the heart of his tune.

"How bright it makes the place—oh! why shouldn't I dance? I'm happy enough now, uncle, and all the gloomy thoughts have flown away for good. Can any one waltz to that tune?"

"I can make a waltz tune of it," said her uncle, suiting the action to the word; "but what do you know of waltzing?"

"Didn't I tell you that Aunt Inez showed me the waltz step?—and haven't I seen them dance at Tavvydale House, when Miss Hester has let me peep into the ball-room, where they've been very gay? To be sure I can waltz—look here!"

Milly, full of life and light, now spun round the room gracefully and rapidly, whilst her uncle played the violin, stamped his foot to keep time, and shouted forth his surprise and his applause.

Uncle and niece were in the midst of their revelry—the heyday of their holiday—when a stream of fine people flowed suddenly into the room, and took the place by storm.

"Well, in all my life—I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Llewellyn.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. LLEWELLYN.

THE fine folk who had thus taken by surprise uncle and niece consisted of Mr., Mrs., and Miss Llewellyn, Hester Fyvie, and her cousin, Mr. Llewellyn, junior—to whom we drew attention in our second chapter as a young man taking a gloomy view of things in general, and oppressed by the idea of Laurence Raxford having cut him out of the partnership—and one or two more visitors on whom the reader cast a glance in the third chapter of this history.

They streamed into the house “just as if it belonged to them,” Mr. Whiteshell remarked afterwards, and took possession *en masse*, with Mrs. Llewellyn as central figure in the picture.

“Well, in all my life—I never!” Mrs. Llewellyn exclaimed then.

Milly stopped dancing, turned very red, and looked

in a bewildered manner from one to another of that select circle by which she was enclosed. One face of the assembly only was a friend's face, and that Milly, in her confusion, failed to take comfort from, notwithstanding its comical, even its consoling expression. Mrs. Llewellyn, very erect and stiff in the back, was a clincher to all comfort at that particular period. Mrs. Llewellyn, with an opportunity to improve the occasion, stood with her gloved hands outspread, amazed at the profanity upon which she had intruded. Mr. Whiteshell, submerged in the shadow of her voluminous skirts, sat hugging his fiddle to his breast, and waiting somewhat nervously for the opportunity to assert his independence.

"To think that a girl with her bread to earn, and a home to keep, should be engaged in this unprofitable and frivolous occupation! To think that here, in the heart of a mining district, a poor creature's vanity should lead her to practise dancing in this wretched hovel. Hester, surely this is not the girl whose praises you have been singing all the week—your protégée?"

"Yes, this is my protégée," said Hester, with her usual alacrity.

"You form your favourites out of very odd material," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "and you must see, Hester, that this is not a proper way for a person of this description to spend her time?"

"Certainly not—most decidedly and indisputably not," affirmed Mr. Llewellyn, jerking his head forward with every adverb; "as Mrs. Llewellyn very justly observed, 'In all my life I never!'"

"And as for you, sir—an old man with one foot in the grave," said Mrs. Llewellyn, wheeling round, and facing Mr. Whiteshell, "I am astonished at you, offering encouragement to a young woman to forget her sphere, and launch herself into the pomps and vanities of a wicked world. Sir, you know as well as I do, that you are instilling into this poor girl's mind a love of society and amusement that may be, from this day, her bane through life—her *bane*, I feel it my duty to remark again."

Mrs. Llewellyn was evidently improving the occasion. At Tavvydale House she had not had a fair opportunity, albeit it was her special *forte* to utter protests, and render people uncomfortable. Here had come to her a splendid chance to condemn

the manners and morals of the lower classes ; and as when a chance occurred, Mrs. Llewellyn dashed at it, regardless of time, or place, or human feelings, in a rampant, bull in a china shop, kind of fashion, so there was nothing unnatural in her behaviour that particular afternoon.

"You, sir," still addressing Mr. Whiteshell, "sitting there, with one foot in the grave," she repeated by way of fixing that impression upon the sinner before her, "ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Madam," commenced Mr. Whiteshell, after swallowing some unwieldy substance that had been sticking in his throat, "I've nothing to be ashamed of, that I am aware—I have never been ashamed of anything that I have done in life, or considered myself answerable to anybody save myself for my actions or opinions. I don't know," he continued, tucking the violin under his arm with emphasis, "whom I have the pleasure to address, or what your business may be, but it strikes me very forcibly that if ever there was a cool and unwarrantable intrusion upon the privacy of——"

"Uncle," cried Milly at this juncture, "these are

visitors from Tavvydale House, and very welcome here."

She dropped a curtsey with her usual quickness, and then stood demurely waiting the pleasure of her guests.

Mr. Whiteshell was astonished at his niece's humility, and continued to writhe uncomfortably on his chair. "That's no reason——" he began.

"Don't bandy words—don't bandy words—don't bandy any impudence with your betters, sir—we don't want any more bandy anything," said Mr. Llewellyn pompously.

"It's absurd," said Mrs. Llewellyn.

"It's extremely absurd," added her husband, "to take any notice of these people. They're never grateful for advice, and always give it back in impudence—I've remarked that," he said turning to one of the party, "from a child."

"Mr. Llewellyn," said his wife, "you will allow me to be the best judge of when it is time to take notice of an error. When I see wrong in any shape or under any circumstance, I have the courage to protest against it."

"I don't deny that," said Mr. Llewellyn, "and indisputably you are right, so far as that goes. But I

don't see, my dear, much occasion to remain longer in this deplorable building. You've spoken your mind, you know?" he added confidentially.

"I can't go any further just at present," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "I don't care about the cascade, and I'll rest here till you all come back, please."

Mr. Whiteshell's instinctive politeness could not keep him in his seat after this admission. He rose and placed his chair at the disposal of the lady, with one of his best bows. Mrs. Llewellyn dropped heavily into it, and without an acknowledgment of the gentleman's courtesy, proceeded to open a large fan, and make vigorous efforts to obtain coolness from it.

"I think that I would rest a little while, aunt," suggested Hester; "the path down the Cleft is very fatiguing, and the one to the cascade still more so. Milly, will you show these ladies and gentlemen the way to the cascade? I did not expect to find you at home, and had volunteered as guide myself, though I should have led them all wrong, I have no doubt. Can you spare the time, do you think?"

"Oh! yes, Miss Fyvie."

"Let that old fiddler show the way," said Mrs.

Llewellyn ; and the old fiddler aforesaid stood upon tiptoe at once, and looked very red behind his white moustache ; “I should like to talk to this girl quietly.”

Milly looked scared, and turned almost an appealing glance towards Miss Fyvie. Hester was ready to respond, but on this occasion Mrs. Llewellyn was too quick for her.

“You know very well that you are acquainted with every step of the way, for the matter of that, Hester,” said Mrs. Llewellyn : “and that I can’t be left here with no one to attend to me—if I had one of my fits, for instance.”

Mr. Whiteshell registered an inward wish that this objectionable woman had had one of them—a nice long one—before starting for the Cleft that afternoon.

“I intend to stay with you, of course, aunt.”

“And spoil the party, or compel me to drag all that wretched way down to the dribble, because of your obstinacy. Why can’t the girl wait here ?”

“I will wait if you wish it, Miss Fyvie,” Milly hastened to say.

“Very well,” replied Hester ; “there’s a good girl,” she whispered ; “I shall not be long, and you

need not mind a word she says, Milly—it's only Mrs. Llewellyn, and she has been put out to-day about something, and is just a little cross with everybody. Let her have her own way, and say nothing."

The party prepared to move again—Miss Llewellyn, who had remained stiff and stony all this time, now carefully tucking up the silk skirt of her dress.

"If Mr. Raxford should pass this way, aunt, you can tell him that we take the lower path, striking to the right, where the Cleft divides—he will not be long coming up in the carriage we have sent for him."

"I'll tell him if I see him," said Mrs. Llewellyn.

"And Mr. Engleton?" suggested Miss Llewellyn, suddenly and spasmodically.

"Oh! I had quite forgotten Mr. Engleton; and here's Cousin Jane anxious about him, aunt," cried Hester, laughing; "why, where can he be? Milly, have you seen a young man with black hair, with his hat on the back of his head, and his hands full of papers, wandering about here to-day?"

"The gentleman who sketches?" asked Mil-

ly; "no, he hasn't been this way to-day."

"Pardon me, Milly, but he has," corrected her uncle; "Mr. Engleton and I have been conferring about a little matter *we* once had in our heads together. He was in the Cleft this morning."

"Which way did he go?" asked Mrs. Llewellyn, sharply.

"Further up the Cleft, madam."

"Then why don't you go and find him? You seem to have nothing to do, but play a lot of profane music all day," she said; "I think it would be better for you to find Mr. Engleton, and tell him that he's wanted."

Mr. Whiteshell, bursting with anger, endeavoured to reflect upon this new proposition calmly, and failed.

"Hester," said Mrs. Llewellyn, "ask this man to go, and give him something for his trouble. I can't manage these people—they're very rude and obstinate about this part of Devonshire. I suppose it's the mines."

"In my case, madam, it's *not* the mines," said Mr. Whiteshell; "I don't happen to have the pleasure of being a resident in Devonshire. On the contrary—I beg your pardon."

This to Miss Fyvie, who had suddenly arrested his attention.

"You are Milly's uncle, I imagine?"

Mr. Whiteshell bowed.

"May I ask the favour of your doing your best to find Mr. Engleton for us?" she said; "we all wish to return in the carriages that are waiting in the high road, near Captain Athorpe's cottage. Possibly if you find Mr. Engleton, you will tell him that, please—it will be better than joining us at the cascade."

"Very good, madam," said Mr. Whiteshell, with a low bow; "I will go with pleasure."

He set down his violin, seized his hat, and departed on his mission, flitting with agility before the company, now strolling leisurely along the path. When fairly out of sight of all intruders on the solitude of the Cleft, he gave a thump to his hat and burst into soliloquy, after his customary way of giving vent to his feelings.

"To oblige a lady, anything that lies in James Whiteshell's power—always, for ever and ever. But to be browbeaten by that bony woman, who can't be a lady, anyhow, I'm certain, it's almost too much to be borne, even for Milly's sake. What a

woman!" he ejaculated again; "why, it's Captain Athorpe over again, in petticoats."

Meanwhile, the lady on whom he had bestowed this adverse criticism was left alone with Milly Athorpe. She had planned this, and schemed for this with no small amount of tact, and here she sat at last triumphant in the sitting-room of the house in the Cleft. It had all come round just as she could have wished, and the arch-conspirator had been so far successful. Milly, as ignorant of the plans that had been woven round her as the company that had filed out of her cottage, stood by the open door, watching for Mr. Raxford, and glancing askance at Mrs. Llewellyn now and then.

A real lady this, thought Milly—unlike Uncle James, she granted that, for only real ladies were connected with Tavvydale House, in Milly's opinion. Nevertheless an odd specimen, with the ways, to a certain extent, of one or two old women in the village, and looking not unlike Bully Churdock's mother, she thought, who was tall, stout, and straight, and presented to observers a pair of cheekbones as high and hard and repellent. And yet Mrs. Churdock had not that harsh, grating voice, or

was in any way intensely disagreeable, as Mrs. Llewellyn was. Never mind, thought Milly, something has put her out, and great people as well as little ones are put out at times; she would make every allowance for Mrs. Llewellyn, as she had done already for Hester Fyvie's sake.

"You can shut the door and sit down," said Mrs. Llewellyn, loftily; "there's no occasion to keep me in the draught."

Milly closed the door, but did not respond to the latter portion of Mrs. Llewellyn's demands. She bustled about the room, took up her uncle's violin and bow, and carried them away into her inner room, returning in a few minutes to set a chair or two straight, and wheel her little table into the centre of the room, whence it had been pushed aside for the convenience of Milly's "steps" at an earlier period.

"I asked you to sit down, young woman," said Mrs. Llewellyn, still more loftily, "it fidgets me to see people moving about."

Milly sat down at this second appeal, and wondered if the colour had died out of her face yet, and feared that it had not, she felt so hot and nervous.

Mrs. Llewellyn, after a deal of preparation, fixed on her nose a pair of gold-mounted glasses, from which trailed a long and massive chain, and got Milly sternly and carefully within range. Milly glanced up for an instant, looked down at her crossed hands in her lap, looked up again, and found herself still under the influence of that calm, steely stare; lowered her large hazel eyes again, felt warmer than ever, and shook hands with herself rather more firmly.

"You're not a bit pretty, after all," said the lady, lowering her glasses, and closing them with an angry snap. "You've a good complexion, and not bad eyes, and that's all you have to be proud of, let them say what they like, and turn your head as they may. You think you're pretty, I suppose?"

Milly looked up frankly.

"Oh! yes, I'm pretty."

This outspoken and confident statement took Mrs. Llewellyn's breath away for an instant. When she had recovered from the effects of Milly's assurance, she informed herself at once that she never did—never!

"That is, everybody says so," said Milly, noting

Mrs. Llewellyn's dismay; "and I don't think that everybody would tell stories. But I'm not more fond of myself for all that, madam. I wish sometimes that I was a little different; but as I can't be, I put up with it, and all the trouble it brings to me."

"Trouble! What do you mean?"

"Nothing," said Milly, not so frankly this time; "but it is a trouble, and one is, as you say, likely to have her head turned by what all her friends say."

"You're—you're an extremely vain young person," commented Mrs. Llewellyn.

"No, I am not—not yet awhile, at least," cried Milly.

"And bold in your way—with a bad habit of contradicting your superiors," added the lady. "Well, anything to the contrary is not to be expected. What are you going to the door again for?"

"I was afraid that Mr. Raxford might pass."

"Let him. It's no business of yours."

"Miss Fyvie said——"

"And I say 'Let him!' He will find Miss Fyvie without your interference, you may depend. You know this Mr. Raxford, it appears?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh! indeed! How's that?"

"He came here last night. He was kind enough to show my uncle the way down the Cleft."

"Ah, I suppose so," added Mrs. Llewellyn; "just as I thought, and just like all the rest of the men. And what do you think of Mr. Raxford?"

"That he is a very kind, good-hearted gentleman—a true gentleman, madam, I am sure."

"You need not be sure of anything in this world—it's not becoming," reproved Mrs. Llewellyn, putting on her glasses again, and focussing poor Milly. "And so the true gentleman was here last night. How long did he stay?"

Milly met Mrs. Llewellyn's cold stare this time unflinchingly.

"Till the storm abated."

"Ah! yes; there was a little rain, I remember," she said; "and may I ask how often Mr. Raxford comes here, and waits up for the storm?"

"He has never been here before," was the calm answer—an answer too calm, a woman of more perception than Mrs. Llewellyn might have perceived.

"You know Mr. Engleton?"

"By sight—yes."

"How often has he been here *sketching*?" she asked ironically.

"I don't know—his sketching is no business of mine, madam. I——"

Milly paused, and left her sentence incomplete. She was going to add, "I mind my own business," and then the thought of Hester Fyvie—the daughter of the patron to whom she felt she never could be grateful enough—arrested the retort uncourteous.

"He speaks to you here?—don't deny it," Mrs. Llewellyn said, with more asperity.

"He bade me good morning once."

"You know Mr. Jonathan Fyvie?"

"My master?—why, of course I do. Know him—ay, and love him, madam, with all my heart, which is ever ready to do him service. He gave me this dear home of mine, because my poor father died in his employ—he has been always kind to me, more than kind, for the sake of my orphanage, and I—I hope—am grateful!"

This enthusiastic outburst had no effect on Mrs. Llewellyn, whose hard face had set in shadow more.

"I am speaking of young Mr. Fyvie—you know that."

Had the flame ever left Milly's cheeks since this inquisitor's appearance, it would have come back then, as it deepened then, and added to the suspicions of the questioner.

"I did not know that."

"Will not the answer do for him—just as it stands?"

"No," murmured Milly in a lower tone.

"You know him, too, of course?"

Milly again replied in the affirmative.

"And you encourage him, too—don't deny that! You are either very foolish, or very ambitious, and build too much on your looks."

"Don't say any more, please."

Mrs. Llewellyn paid no heed to this hastily-uttered remonstrance. She was full of her subject, and went on.

"I warn you, girl, of your danger—I have come to warn you. Your doll's face," she said vindictively, as though Milly's good looks aggravated her in spite of herself, "will bring you to ruin, if you dream of captivating a man of the world like my nephew. Take a woman's advice, and give up

your designs in that quarter—beware of such a man, as of a fox. You hear me ?”

“Madam,” cried Milly, “what do you mean ?”

Milly had risen, and was standing very erect, and at a little distance from her tormentor. Her voice had lost its clearness of articulation, and was husky with emotion.

“A man, young and romantic, like Mr. Raxford, might succumb to the designs of a pretty woman, but my nephew—never. So I warn you for your own good ; and I warn you in secret to hold yourself aloof from our family. Milly Athorpe, I know you better than you know yourself. I have been on the watch here.”

Mrs. Llewellyn had become heated by her warning ; with her tall ungainly figure swaying to and fro as she spoke, with the hard face, reddened by excitement, and the big gloved hands gesticulating with vehemence, she looked less like “the real lady” than ever.

“You hear me, you young Jezebel,” she said coarsely, “or haven’t I spoken plain enough. If not, I tell you—one woman to woman—that——”

Milly flung open the door of her cottage with an impatient hand.

"Leave my house, madam!—you insult me, and I will not have it."

"What—what—is that the way you receive an act of kindness from me?"

"I dispute such kindness—I won't have it. You should blush to offer it—you *are* blushing!"

"Do you know who I am?" cried Mrs. Llewellyn.

"Do you know to whom *you* are speaking?" rejoined Milly, forgetful of all respect to rank and station now; "to a girl who has a good name of her own, and will keep it—one who is respected here, and has never heard a word against her till you came here with your slanders this afternoon. Madam, I have borne enough—you will please to leave my house!"

"I shall not go till I choose," said Mrs. Llewellyn stoutly; "and I don't think," with an ironical laugh, "that you are strong enough to put me out. You can leave off these stagey manners, and shut the door, as soon as you please."

"You dare to remain!"

"You dare to tell me to go!" almost shrieked the lady, "when I have come here for your own good. You dare to tell me that you have not

allowed young Jonathan Fyvie to make love to you. Why, last summer—as far back as last summer—I saw you and him together talking in the Cleft—you know it!”

Milly turned as though she could annihilate Mrs. Llewellyn at this new charge, and even that good lady felt uncomfortable for an instant beneath the girl's indignant glances.

“You don't deny it—there.”

“Madam, I do deny it. I have been taught to speak the truth.”

“You never spoke of this.”

“And I have been taught to respect my employers—and—I have tried!”

“Respect!”

“I—I might have explained, had you treated me fairly,” said Milly, “might even have broken my word, for the sake of my name, had you been more kind and charitable—now, I only ask you to go, believing whatever pleases you most.”

“Milly Athorpe, I wish to speak to you in earnest,” said Mrs. Llewellyn eagerly—“I wish to trust in you. I have not told you all that I came to this place for. I have been hasty, and spoken too abruptly—it is my way—I have never studied

refinement. Now we are alone, and have had this foolish quarrel out, let me—why, she's gone!"

The door was open, and Milly had disappeared, leaving her house to the possession of the enemy. Mrs. Llewellyn rose in her amazement, walked to the door, and looked down the slope, and along the Cleft path right and left, but there was no sign of Milly.

"The girl must have flown," muttered Mrs. Llewellyn; "and all because I have found her out in her artfulness. If she had only stopped, it would have been so much better for her and me. I begin to fancy that I have acted like a fool!"

She returned to the chair she had quitted, took her square chin in her hand, and stared hard at the empty fire-place. Milly's impetuosity had evidently baffled her, and she sat there with the look of a disappointed woman.

Presently she altered her position suddenly, and looked towards the open doorway, darkened by a shadow.

"Ah! you have thought better——what, Jonathan!"

"Heard that you had come on to the Cleft, and spun along after you," said Mr. Fyvie, junior, enter-

ing the house. "Where have they all gone?"

"Down the Cleft. Where have *you* been these last four-and-twenty hours, and what is the matter with your arm?"

Jonathan looked at his right arm, which was supported by a sling, and laughed very pleasantly.

"Oh! a bit of a sprain, aunt," he said. "That confounded horse of mine made a bolt of it last night and threw me. I think I shall shoot the brute. Where's Milly?"

"How should I know," answered his amiable relative.

CHAPTER XIII.

MILLY IS CONSOLED, AND HER UNCLE ONCE MORE
ASTONISHED.

MRS. LLEWELLYN was right. Milly had *flown* down the slope, and along the Cleft; she never knew how she got out of sight of the cottage, and scarcely understood the motive which impelled her on so rapidly afterwards. There was a vague sense of seeking Captain Athorpe's protection, of telling him all, and trusting in his strength and pride to stand her friend; but that motive grew less powerful as she proceeded, and finally brought her to a full stop for reconsideration.

Her uncle was a hasty man—worse still, a suspicious one. What would he say when she told him that Jonathan Fyvie had met her in the Cleft, and that she had never spoken of the meeting to him? Would he believe her statement?—surely he would do so, after the first outburst of passion was over, and shelter with his strong arm

and his stout heart the child of his dead brother. Then Milly began to consider if it were worth all the words, the suspicions, and the quarrels which would follow her revelation. She had been taunted, reproved, suspected by an ill-tempered woman, whom she might never see again, and who, at least, had made no mischief with her name at the great house. A woman who might have spoken without due consideration, and would repent of her rashness in cooler moments—just as most people repented. But oh! she was a terrible woman—coarse, distrustful, and uncharitable, and the thought that her good name was in the power of that woman—above all, that her own explanation after this would not avail her much—brought back, suddenly and fiercely, all the past emotions which had hurled Milly, as it were, from the house.

She had felt strong till then—strong to resist, and to hold her ground firmly and honestly, as she had held it in the Cleft. Now she gave way, covered her face with her hands, and began crying very bitterly with the reminiscences of the insults that had been heaped upon her, until a voice startled her by its proximity.

"Why, Milly, what's the matter?"

"Oh! Mr. Raxford," she said, looking up, and fighting desperately to clear away her tears with both hands, "it's nothing—nothing at all."

"Crying fit to break your heart, and rousing all the echoes of the Cleft with your sobs. Why, I thought that you were the happiest girl in Devonshire!"

"I was happy until this morning," said Milly.

"And now you're only the happiest girl in Wind-Whistle Cleft," he said, "the female sex therein being limited to one. I could have sworn that you were breaking your heart, and, by George! you turned me all goose-flesh to hear you. I don't like to hear a woman cry, Milly."

Milly looked at him. He had evidently been startled by her grief, and was more pale than she had seen him yesternight.

"There, I shan't cry any more," she said; "please go on to the cottage, Mr. Raxford—you'll find Mrs. Llewellyn there. The rest are at the cascade."

Laurence was very quick in leaping to conclusions—leaping the right way, and on to the very debatable ground sometimes, as he did in this

instance. Mrs. Llewellyn at the cottage, his experience of that estimable lady, Milly in tears, and ostensibly turned out of her own house—he saw the hitch in the machinery at once, and very frankly expressed his opinions.

“I see now,” he said, laughing—“it’s Mother Llewellyn who has been stirring up the household gods. Ah! and she can stir, too; she has been taking pity on your poor birth and your bad blood, perhaps?”

“She has not been bestowing any pity upon me!” cried Milly, indignantly.

“I’m right, I see. There’s a prophet for you, Milly!” he said—“come to me to sift out a mystery. It *was* Mrs. Llewellyn, then?”

“Yes, it was.”

“Oh! never mind her,” was the easy advice proffered here, as he sat on the stump of a tree, swinging his legs backwards and forwards as he spoke. “I’m sure that anything that that old lady has said there’s no occasion to cry for. She means very well in her way, but it’s not a nice way; and she’s a trifle uppish, but you soon get used to it; and half she says and does is mere playfulness—a kind of playfulness that takes a

long time to understand, but she intends no harm. Here, let us go back together, and I'll induce her to offer an apology—quite a handsome apology for her.”

“I shall be back presently, Mr. Raxford—please leave me now, and don't say that I have met you, or told you that she made me cry. Why, what would she say to that, too!” was the indignant exclamation here.

“Oh! she would have her little joke about that, I daresay,” said Laurence drily; “I'll not say anything, as you wish to let the matter drop. Have you seen young Mr. Fyvie?”

“No, sir.”

“The coachman told me that he came this way a little while ago,” said Laurence; “I suppose he's somewhere in the neighbourhood.”

“Did the coachman tell you that he saw him here?”

“Yes.”

“How long ago?” was the eager question; “if I could only—perhaps, he came by the river's bed, a favourite walk of his, sir, and thus you missed him.”

“And thus I missed him,” repeated Laurence,

looking over the bank at the river's bed aforesaid ;
"it's not a walk that I should have fancied Jonathan taking—too rough and scrambly for him. Well, are you better, Milly ?"

"Yes, sir—all my bad tempers have cried themselves away."

"And you are the happy Milly again ?"

"I shall feel happy soon, I hope."

Laurence thought how pretty she looked standing a few paces from him, with her nervous little fingers pleating up her dress unconsciously ; certainly the prettiest girl whom he had ever seen—and he had had an eye for beauty all his life, too, an innocent eye, purely artistic, and with no vulgar habit of winking. And Milly, in trouble, had awakened his interest as well as his passive admiration—and Milly's embarrassment puzzled him, and seemed a something different to last night's bashfulness. Still he *was* a true gentleman, and deserving of Milly's past encomiums ; he saw that she was getting more confused the longer he stayed there, and he hastened at once to withdraw.

"One moment, sir," Milly said, to his astonishment ; "it's a rude question of mine, perhaps, but

do you really think that no one pays much heed to what Mrs. Llewellyn says?"

Laurence reflected for an instant.

"I don't think anybody pays a great deal of attention—I don't," said Laurence, "and I never met with anybody who did. I'm sure, Milly, that *you* need not be alarmed."

"Then I will not," said Milly with alacrity; "she—she has not said anything that I care about—that can do me any harm—or that is true. I'll shake her off my mind, sir."

She gave an impetuous toss to her head, as though by that gesture she shook her off at once, and Laurence cried—

"That's well, Milly."

"Only my pride after all, standing in the way of my own happiness," she said. "To think that I should let the Athorpe pride get the better of *me*, too!"

"Ah! pride's a bore in its way," remarked Laurence, "and yet my mother has always told me that I never had pride enough, or high notions enough—and I fear that my low ideas have even worried her at times."

"You have a mother?"

"Yes—the best-tempered, largest-hearted woman in the world, Milly."

"If I had one—if I could call mine back to take my part!" cried Milly earnestly, "or to sit down by my side, and keep me from utter loneliness."

"There, you're going to begin again—and upon my honour," he said with affected lightness, that, however, had its effect, "you're old enough to know better."

"Yes—you're right, sir."

Milly smiled at her companion's comical gravity; and Laurence left her smiling, and congratulated himself *en route* on the extraordinary tact which he had displayed in soothing the ruffled feelings of the maiden.

At Milly's cottage he found Mrs. Llewellyn sitting in state, with Jonathan Fyvie leaning against the mantel-piece, engaged in the ungentlemanlike occupation of aggravating her. These two had been sparing politely from the moment of their meeting, and Mrs. Llewellyn had evidently, from her heightened colour, and the disturbed condition of her bonnet strings—which she had a habit of tightening in moments of excitement—had the worst of the conflict.

Not that Jonathan had fought his battles without receiving several hard hits, but then hard hits never affected him; he took things easily and deliberately, not letting his own feelings be wounded much, and caring very little for other people's. Possessing a temper that was difficult to disturb, he made not the slightest allowance for folk less graciously endowed than he.

"Ah! Laurence, just in time," he said as our hero entered; "here is Mrs. Llewellyn fretting about you—wondering what can keep you so long from pleasant company? The horses did not upset you as my brute did last night, I hope?"

He touched his wounded arm lightly as he spoke, and Laurence said,

"Thrown, Jonathan?"

"Lightly tilted off—that's all. Nothing to speak of."

"Glad to hear it," said Laurence, "and glad to see you, Jonathan, though I wish the meeting had occurred one mile further on."

"At the mines, you mean? Why, the mines are where I left them last!"

"Yes," answered Laurence.

"And I can't play the working partner—the

hard-working partner like you, Laurence. Are you not tired already of the excessive application?"

"On the contrary, I like the application vastly."

"Ah! you are the industrious and I the idle boy. Wait till you are my age, young fellow," he said with mock solemnity, "when the world has palled upon you, and 'Nil Admirari' is the one true motto to swear by. You got my cigars all right?"

"Thank you, Jonathan—yes. I should have written to thank you for your attention."

"Oh! I hate letters," replied his partner, "I'm glad you did not. Are you going down to the cascade?"

"Certainly I am."

"Mr. Raxford is in no hurry, at all events," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "upon my word, if I were Miss Fyvie, I should not compliment him on his lover's haste."

"If you were Miss Fyvie—ah! what a sister I should have to counsel and guide me," said Jonathan.

"And you require counsel, heaven knows!" said Mrs. Llewellyn.

"But, then, what an aunt I should lose," he said, making a wry face at Laurence.

"That'll do, Jonathan—you are never more of a blackguard than when you think you're satirical," the good lady said bluntly; "what are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to smoke, if I am fortunate enough to obtain your permission."

"Not in this house, at all events. Not whilst I am here," she said, rising with becoming dignity; "Mr. Raxford, will you see me to the cascade?"

Mr. Raxford could but bow and express his willingness to escort her in that direction.

"You will join us, Jonathan?" he said.

Jonathan, who had immediately dropped into the chair vacated by Mrs. Llewellyn, turned his handsome head languidly round.

"I'm not fond of cascades, Laurence—they're very monotonous and damp," he replied; "besides, I'm tired, and almost an invalid, with all an invalid's caprices. If you see Milly——"

Both Mrs. Llewellyn and Laurence halted and looked more intently at the speaker, who did not appear, however, to be struck by their new interest.

"If you see Milly, tell her it is rather dull work here alone, and that I have no objection to company."

"You'll never stop," began Laurence, when he felt Mrs. Llewellyn's firm grip upon his arm.

"This way, Mr. Raxford," she said, "I think I can find the cascade for you, and we must let Mr. Jonathan have his way. An obstinate man, for all his easy manners, sir."

And with this Parthian dart at her nephew, she convoyed our hero from the house—our hero, still far from satisfied.

"I'm sure that he will distress Milly very much by retaining possession of her house like that," said Laurence; "upon my word, it's scarcely fair."

"Milly is used to visitors at all times and seasons," was the pointed reply; "hers is a pretty face, that draws 'the fellows' to it! You are not afraid of your partner paying too much attention in that direction, Mr. Raxford?"

"Afraid!—why no?"

"Not even of Milly being impressed by so great a gentleman as *he* is," nodding her head in the direction of the house they were quitting.

"Milly can take care of herself, I have no doubt."

"Milly knows Jonathan Fyvie by this time, and how far she can trust him. If I was she, I would keep clear of that place until——"

"Why, madam, you don't think that he would be brute enough to say one word to render a defenceless girl afraid of him! I don't know my partner well—I scarcely understand him; but if you think that, is it fair to——"

"I think Milly is safe enough—you need not be alarmed, sir," she interrupted; "here comes her natural protector, to stand between her and all harm, if she is not strong enough to protect herself."

Laurence might have wondered more at the bitterness—even the coarseness—of this masculine woman's words, had he not felt grateful—for a reason that he did not attempt to explain to himself—at the sudden appearance of Mr. Whiteshell advancing up the slope, talking to himself, and shaking his head energetically to and fro. The little gentleman was bent double in the ascent, and, tired with his search for Mr. Engleton, was toiling upwards evidently with difficulty. At the sight of the lady and gentleman above him, he made an effort to appear less fatigued, as though his cha-

racter for lightness and agility was at stake, and made the rest of his way more buoyantly towards them.

"Oh! here's that wretched old man," muttered Mrs. Llewellyn.

Whether Laurence was also inclined, out of the perversity of human nature, to annoy Mrs. Llewellyn, or was really genuine in his warmth of greeting, was a doubtful point; but he extended his hand frankly to Mr. Whiteshell, as they approached each other.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Whiteshell," he said; "I hope that you are well to-day, and have shaken off all the ill-effects of last night's journey?"

Mr. Whiteshell stood upright, and took his hat off with his left hand, as he seized Laurence's right. He was grateful—intensely grateful—for Laurence's notice of him in the presence of a woman who had treated him ungenerously.

"Thank you, I am very well, Mr. Raxford. A charming day, is it not?"

"A beautiful day. You will find a gentleman in sole possession of your cottage, Mr. Whiteshell; but he will not give you any trouble."

"Oh! another of them," said Mr. Whiteshell,

with a blank expression of countenance; "very well then—we must make the best of him. And Milly?"

"Is in the Cleft—coming home, I believe."

"What did she go out for?" he asked, with a suspicious glance at Mrs. Llewellyn.

"Well, I can't answer that question myself," said Laurence.

"But I can," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "because she was rude, and not disposed to listen to well-meant advice. I would have talked to that child like a mother, if she had only had a little patience."

"Hasty at times—like *her* mother," explained Mr. Whiteshell; "a girl imbued with a certain amount of impulsiveness, which, however, always leads her right. A quick instinct, I call it."

"Never mind what you call it," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "where's Mr. Engleton?—you found him?"

"I found him," repeated the dancing-master.

"Alone?" was the sharp inquiry.

"Well, he was in company with—with a thirty yard circular measure, and a long stick," replied Mr. Whiteshell, prolonging the lady's evident anxiety as far as possible; "and I delivered your kind message. Good afternoon."

"That's a hateful old scamp," observed Mrs. Llewellyn, before he was out of hearing; "presumptuous, officious, garrulous, everything that is objectionable in elderly persons of that class of life."

"Pardon me," said Laurence, frankly; "but I don't think so."

Mr. Whiteshell heard Laurence's remark also, and went towards his niece's cottage with a lighter heart in consequence. He broke into a soliloquy after his usual fashion, and went upwards muttering aloud,

"He don't think so," he said; "bravo, Mr. Raxford! That's one in my favour, and one I owe you, my young champion. A good and honest fellow, who is not afraid of speaking out—a gentleman, with all the true gentility that respects old age, its crotchets, feelings, and position; upon my honour, I like that young man very much indeed! Why, there's something in his smile that warms one's heart like wine; and—good gracious, talking about wine, there are three glasses yet in the bottle, and a man alone in the house with them!"

There was no forced agility in Mr. Whiteshell's remaining steps; he bounded with airiness up the

slope, paused for an instant to snatch a new breath from the fresh air in the Cleft that day, skipped through the open door into the house, and then skipped backwards once more to the threshold, reaching out both hands to clasp the sides of the doorway, and save himself from falling.

Jonathan Fyvie, who had been sitting with his face towards the empty fire-place, staring intently before him, and puffing away at his cigar, turned at the entrance of Mr. Whiteshell, and looked at him dreamily.

"All in one day—rising from the dead, and bringing back to life the troubles which I hoped had died with them," he exclaimed. "I see it now. God forgive me if I'm wrong, but I think I see it all!"

"Come in, old gentleman—and excuse the smoke," said Jonathan.

"I am com—coming in," answered Whiteshell, advancing slowly forwards at this invitation—"coming to unmask you!"

"Eh?—who are you—a madman?"

"An old man, who knew you six years since in London, and knew nothing to your credit. A man who thought you bad then, and believes you

worse now. From beginning to end, I'm sure I see it all, and it is a dreadful story."

"I don't know you."

"You were always a liar; and you have taught her to lie. She lied to me this morning, God forgive her; and I know now why there was a doubt in my heart, despite all her protestations."

"You are speaking of—Milly?"

"Of Inez Athorpe—you can't deceive me any longer. You can't lead me wrong again," cried the old man indignantly; "or teach me in any way to swerve from that which is my duty. I must tell all."

"No, don't do that! You are wrong in your judgment still—I swear to God you are," said Jonathan Fyvie, waking up to an excitement and an animation that were new to his character, or to us, witnesses of it hitherto. "Shut that door—turn the key in the lock for a moment. Sit down, Whiteshell. It is all easily explained."

Whiteshell hesitated.

"It might be worth your while to murder me," he said. "I can't tell how far your laxity of principle extends."

To Mr. Whiteshell's astonishment, Jonathan

Fyvie produced a pistol from his pocket and flung it towards him. The old man caught the weapon adroitly enough, and looked from it to the man who had hurled it towards him.

"There—that is loaded. I carry desperate weapons, you see. It is necessary in this place ! I am in your hands now, and you can shoot me if you have a doubt of me. Man, you must listen, or your folly will be the ruin of us. Lock that door !"

Whiteshell locked the door at this second adjuration, and then approached the last speaker, who had crossed his arms on the back of the chair, and had turned round somewhat to bury his face in them.

"I am ready, sir," said the old man, taking the seat Milly had recently occupied.

"Thank you," murmured Jonathan ; " this is kind of you."

"For her sake—not for yours, sir."

"Yes, yes ; and for her sake, I thank you."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CASCADE.

MRS. LLEWELLYN and our hero proceeded in the direction of the cascade, both silent for awhile after Laurence's quiet but firm defence of Mr. Whiteshell. Mrs. Llewellyn was not disposed to quarrel with Laurence that day, to resent as an affront every remark that was opposed to her views. Though a little irritated her, still there were times when she could bear a great deal, if not disguise it—and she was inclined, for a definite period, to put up with the mild opposition which Laurence might feel inclined to offer. If she were clumsy in her scheming, still she was a great schemer all the same.

The path to the cascade was narrow as well as circuitous, and necessitated Mrs. Llewellyn proceeding on in advance; this assisted her views, and concealed a face that was in the habit of be-

traying her—that had already betrayed her that day to Milly Athorpe. She trudged on, taking long strides like a life-guardsman, and evincing none of that fatigue of which she had previously complained to Hester. Laurence in the rear was left to admire the upright carriage of the lady, the breadth across the shoulders, the elevation of the head, which sent the lace bonnet down her back—to admire also the courage of Mr. Llewellyn, who had at an anterior period taken such a wife—however fine and portly—to himself. When she looked round once or twice at him, and her hard grey eyes, high cheek-bones, and Roman nose confronted him for a fleeting moment, he admired the courage of the Treasury clerk more than ever.

Mrs. Llewellyn resumed the conversation when she had led the way by the lower path, that seemed to dip into the Cleft itself, and then to alter its mind at the eleventh hour, and wind gracefully close to the bed of the stream, under a canopy of foliage that shut in everything, and would have rendered everything as still as beautiful, but for the babbling of the water at their feet.

“You met this Milly as you came down the the Cleft to-day, Mr. Raxford?” she asked.

"Yes," answered he.

"And last night she tells me that you had supper at her house—and very proud and vain she appears to be of the honour."

"Indeed!" said Laurence, "it takes a very little to make Milly proud, then."

"A girl's head is easily turned," said Mrs. Llewellyn. "The more's the pity. Did she tell you that I gave her quite a scolding?"

Then she looked round for the first time, and Laurence admired Mr. Llewellyn's courage as aforesaid.

"Well, she seemed as if she were a little put out. She's not used to scoldings, I dare say, poor girl!" said Laurence.

"Why poor girl?"

Laurence was taken aback at this, though Mrs. Llewellyn was trudging on now, a grim Mentor to this Telemachus.

"I don't know why. Because she seems to me very much alone in the world—a girl without a friend or confidante. Possibly it's her peculiar position in the Cleft which suggests the fancy, rather than proves the fact."

"She has two uncles—one's an idiot, and the

other is a madman, but still she's not without friends!" remarked the lady.

"And all the mining people are her friends too, I hear—so my pity is out of place."

"Take care, Mr. Laurence, pity is always akin to love, especially that pity which founds its interest on a pretty girl."

She looked round again—this time with an expression intended to be arch and playful, but which succeeded only in making Laurence Raxford shiver. If ever there was a man deserving of a statue of gold, that man was Mr. Llewellyn, thought our hero!

"Forewarned is forearmed, Mrs. Llewellyn," he said, laughing. "I thank you for your caution."

"It is freely given, sir," she answered; "and I am glad for once to find you grateful. *You* think Milly pretty, of course?"

"Yes, she is pretty," was the frank reply.

"*Very* pretty?"

"Yes—I think that she is very pretty."

"I am of the same opinion," confessed the lady, with a happy forgetfulness of her previous criticism.

"It is a dangerous gift for a girl like her—such girls are always vain, eager for admiration, and ro-

mantic. You have made good use of your time and liberty here, for you seem to have turned her head. She can talk of nothing but what a gentleman you are."

Laurence certainly gasped for breath at this; Mrs. Llewellyn was not a woman fond of quoting praises at second-hand to him or her on whom they had been bestowed. She quoted them harshly now, as though they displeased her in the utterance; and Laurence did not feel inclined to disbelieve the speaker—on the contrary, felt a thrill of delight pass through him, which was perfectly unaccountable. It was pleasant to think that Milly had let this avowal escape her; he liked to be thought all that was honourable and good, and though Milly had had but little opportunity of judging, still her criticism was none the less acceptable.

He laughed, however, as though the matter was a very good joke, so far as it went. Of such hypocritical stuff are the men of the present day made, fair readers.

"Very kind of her, I'm sure," he said; "the result of my extra exertions to obtain her a fortnight's holiday. All bribery and corruption on my part, Mrs. Llewellyn."

Mrs. Llewellyn, suddenly hearing voices in advance, came to a full stop, and faced our hero. She had an instinctive perception that she was succeeding in this quarter, and the final *coup* had yet to be made. Probably it would have been better to allow the subject to drop at this juncture, but then Mrs. Llewellyn was not graceful in her strategy, and exposed her hand very often in her eagerness. Laurence Raxford, shallow enough on this particular afternoon, was seized then with a certain amount of suspicion at the lady's anxiety. He had long ago set her down as dogmatic, eccentric and vulgar—opposed to him from their first acquaintance together, and seeing in him but a rival to her son's advancement—and he began to feel astonished at this sudden interest in him. It might be all very genuine—all very natural; but he did not exactly understand it, and from that moment he stood upon his guard.

"Mr. Raxford, I am a woman of the world," she said—"a plain speaker enough, calling things by their right names, and seeing most things in a clear light. I don't suppose that there's anything in Milly's head but a silly admiration for a man above her sphere—these country girls are silly in

that way, the whole of them—and I'm sure that you would not encourage the fancy for one instant after you had been warned of it. It might give you a bad name in these parts, and set my high-spirited, but jealous niece against you. So it will be better, if you're a man of discretion, not to throw yourself in Milly Athorpe's way—not to see her again, if you can help it."

"Madam, I saw this Milly Athorpe last night, for the first time."

"Oh! I don't believe that. It is not likely."

Laurence's face changed colour at this flat denial.

"Just as you please, Mrs. Llewellyn," he said quietly.

"If it is true, why, then, it is the more remarkable," she added; "you need not take offence at my surprise."

"I trust, Mrs. Llewellyn, that this ridiculous story will go no further," said Laurence.

"Oh! you may rely upon my secrecy."

"It isn't a secret exactly," said Laurence, annoyed at the turn which the dialogue had taken; "but people—all sorts of people—are quick with their suspicions about here, it seems; and the

whole matter is very foolish, and might lead to mischief."

"Just what I say," said Mrs. Llewellyn, innocently. "Why, there was that hare-brained nephew of mine, people said, inclined to make love to Milly, when there was no ground for it, save a few of those compliments with which you men are prolific, and which Milly took with a very ill grace indeed; for I must say Milly is a proud girl, and dislikes attentions *generally*."

If he were King of England to-morrow, he would present Mr. Llewellyn with the Victoria Cross, thought Laurence, amidst the confusion of his brain, engendered by the remarks of his companion and tormentor.

"But you may rely upon my secrecy," she said again, this time in a loud tone; "I am not a woman to make mischief."

"What are you talking about so intently?" cried Hester Fyvie, suddenly appearing upon the scene. "I shall be eavesdropping next out of sheer curiosity."

After Laurence had exchanged greetings with his betrothed, he could not fail to notice that there was a spot of red on either cheek, as

though something had arisen to vex or embarrass Hester—and yet generally pale as a statue. Still she was very glad to see Laurence again, and there was a timid pressure of his hand, by way of return to his lover's greeting. And it was not the nervous words of Mrs. Llewellyn that had tended to flush Hester's cheeks, thought Laurence, if his welcome would have been less warm and friendly.

"What a time you have been, Laurence," she said half-reproachfully; "I have been actually preaching sermons here to keep my audience together. Why, I thought that you would be glad of a holiday."

"So I am," answered Laurence, "but I was at the bottom of the mine when the carriage came, and a miner's dress, with a candle in my cap, was scarcely appropriate to the Cleft."

"Is Mr. Engleton here?" asked Mrs. Llewellyn; "the old man said that he had found him."

"Yes. He and Jane are quite confidential, aunt. Don't interrupt them."

"Oh! Hester, what a frivolous girl you are!" said Mrs. Llewellyn, as she proceeded along the path, to judge for herself of the accuracy of her niece's statement.

Hester and Laurence went on slowly together, as well as the narrowness of the path would admit.

• “You are coming back to dinner with us, Laurence?” inquired Hester.

“Why, of course I am. It was very kind of you to meet me half-way.”

“I had a letter from your mother yesterday.”

“Ah! she writes to you now as to a dear daughter. Well, and cheerful and busy, I hope—sending no end of love to me, although I received it first hand two days ago.”

“Yes—she sends her love to her dear boy. And now,” she said, with that Fyvie quickness, which Laurence had noticed more than once before, and which, in its pleasant crispness, had helped to win Laurence, “why does the dear boy keep a secret from me, and trust in—Aunt Llewellyn?”

Laurence was perplexed by this interrogative, conveyed, as it was, half-jestingly. The whole matter, though not worthy of an explanation, was exceedingly difficult to explain. He did not respond very readily to Miss Fyvie’s inquiry, and the red spot on either cheek certainly increased in circumference, and spread itself for an instant in a roseate flush over her whole face. For the first

MEMORANDUM

TO : THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
FROM : THE CHIEF OF THE ARMY
SUBJECT: [Illegible]

1. [Illegible]

2. [Illegible]

3. [Illegible]

4. [Illegible]

5. [Illegible]

aunt have meant by those last words which she had just caught. Her aunt had promised secrecy, and added—and these were the galling words which Hester could not get rid of, and which stuck like a burr on her thoughts—“*I am not a woman to make mischief.*” To make mischief!—whatever could Aunt Llewellyn mean by that?—what mischief, and with whom? The more she considered these minor points, the more Hester thought that she had been slighted; and as she was a girl who had been petted and spoiled all her life, the greater seemed the indignity, coming, too, from the man who had spoken of love to her.

Laurence considered the subject concluded for good. He was glad that it had passed away without an explanation, for he could not gracefully tell Hester that Mrs. Llewellyn fancied that Milly Athorpe was in love with him; it *was* all nonsense, and so dismissed as nonsense for ever! Hester was a sensible girl not to press for a solution to the absurd mystery which Mrs. Llewellyn had erected. He was admiring her common sense just as Hester had made up her mind, like a vexed and positive girl of twenty years as she was, that she *would* find out what it all meant. It was unkind of

Laurence to put her off like that, she thought, as the tears rose to her eyes, despite her—it was very unkind indeed.

Hester Fyvie was no heroine, simply a woman—one of those young women whom we meet very often in life. Capricious in many things, earnest in a few; quick-witted, but a little suspicious, as quick-witted girls always are; vain of herself and her surroundings, in a small degree; romantic, warm-hearted, and having strong likes and dislikes; ready to make any sacrifice, or to make herself a vixen, just as circumstances turned up—in fact, an impressionable, inconsistent girl of twenty. She was very fond of Laurence, the first man for whom she had taken more than a fancy, and of whose love she was proud; but for all that she was resolved to punish him for his easy indifference to her curiosity.

A curve of the narrow path, a dip suddenly downwards to a lower depth, where half a dozen huge rocks served as stepping-stones for the adventurers, and then Laurence and Hester, crossing the stream to a mossy bank on the other side, where were congregated the guests from Tavvydale House, and where to the right of them, falling

from the rocks some fifty feet above, swept a thin sheet of silver, that dashed its spray at their feet, and then swept on amongst the boulders, to swell for ever the waters of the Cleft.

"Oh! this is the cascade, Hester, is it?" asked Laurence; "well, it has a pretty effect, if it is not absolutely grand and imposing."

"It will do for Devonshire," said Hester pertly. She had been nursing her indignation for some time now—she had been very grave and silent, without his appearing in any way troubled by her new demeanour. It was quite time to show that she *was* offended with him—just a little!

"Yes—Devonshire must be thankful for what it can get in the way of waterfalls," he answered, after a furtive glance at Hester.

"I don't see anything in it myself," said Mr. Llewellyn, standing on one of the stones in the centre of the stream, surveying the fall, with his hands in his pockets, and his head on one side; "it seems a kind of fuss about nothing to me."

"We make a fuss about nothing occasionally," said Laurence.

Hester quite jumped at this—jumped very unnecessarily, and hugged the reproof to her breast,

taking it all to herself, and smarting under the words which Laurence had uttered quite innocently, and without intending any double meaning. Mr. Llewellyn had appeared to wait for a reply, and Laurence had given one without a moment's consideration, not seeing how a wrongful interpretation might be put upon it, until Hester's sudden start suggested the idea. Then he turned very quickly to her, who turned very quickly away from him, and escaped his words altogether, resolving to have war to the knife for that day at least.

Hester went at once to the side of Mr. Engleton, who *had* been conversing with Miss Llewellyn, but had found means to change his position to the edge of the stream, where he stood in a critical attitude, not unlike that of the Treasury clerk's.

"What do you think of our poor despised fall, Mr. Engleton?" Hester asked almost coquettishly. "May I ask you to be my champion against all these insidious attacks upon the beauties of Tavvydale?"

"Don't they like it, Miss Fyvie?" asked Mr. Engleton.

"I have not heard a word in its favour yet," she replied.

"It's very poor," cried Mrs. Llewellyn; "I always said that it was very poor."

"It's very pretty, I think," Mr. Engleton affirmed, in the face of all these disparaging remarks; "but it's a pity it can't be turned to some use. I don't like to see waste."

"Waste," said Mr. Llewellyn; "where's the waste, sir? It goes into the Tavvydale stream, and is of some use, I suppose."

"Or it wouldn't have been put there," said Miss Fyvie, suddenly bursting forth in a pious direction.

"And after it has joined the other streams we find it very handy at our mine," added Laurence; "it does all the work there."

"Our mine!" growled Mr. Llewellyn junior to another young gentleman, looking almost as sulky as himself; "he has soon got into the tall talk, Bowers."

"He just has!" affirmed the inelegant Bowers; "it's like the lot."

"Handy for the mine—exactly," said Engleton, "and rewarded for its handiness by arsenical deposits. Now, I should like to see this rush of pure clear spring water falling for ever down Holborn Hill, for instance."

“Bless my soul, what a remarkable idea!” ejaculated Mr. Llewellyn, still poised upon his stone in the stream; “what for, sir? And what’s to be done with it when it gets to Farringdon Street?”

“It might flow on into the Thames, just as this flows into the Tavvy—and in the heart of London, sir, it would be the best drinking fountain for the masses that could possibly exist. Fancy, for an instant, that cascade, with its—with its——”

“Trimnings,” suggested Mr. Bowers.

“With its natural features, just as they are developed in this instance,” continued Mr. Engleton, without paying any heed to the last suggestion made him, “standing in the streets of London to gladden the souls of the poor. Fancy that water a fountain, at which the thirsty wayfarer, and the tired workmen might drink—where a man, turning suddenly from the stir and turmoil of the city, might find a picture of Arcadia. Fancy, from your point of view, Mr. Llewellyn—excuse me one instant——”

“Good God, sir!—mind what you are about. I’m going!”

Before the words had escaped Mr. Llewellyn’s

lips, the speaker had gone!—or at least one leg had gone up to the knee in the stream. Mr. Engleton had sprung lightly and suddenly on to the stone, coming into collision with Mr. Llewellyn, who had turned upon him with the clutch of despair, upon discovering his basis of support slipping from under him.

“My dear sir—I beg your pardon,” cried the shocked Mr. Engleton, dragging at the gentleman who had betrayed so great an interest in his poetic idea, “I’m afraid—I’m afraid you’re wet.”

“I should think I was, sir,” bawled Mr. Llewellyn, losing his respect for Mr. Engleton along with his temper, as he drew one limb, wet and dripping, from the stream; “I daresay I’ve caught my death by your infernal clumsiness. Yes, I said my *death*, ladies and gentlemen,” he added with a hyena-like smile at the company, “and that appears to amuse you very much, though I don’t see anything to giggle at myself. Mrs. Llewellyn I’m going home!”

“Really, I’m very sorry,” murmured the distressed Mr. Engleton, as his late companion leaped from stone to stone till he reached the path by which they had come to the Cleft.

1. The first part of the report is a general
description of the project and its objectives.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed
description of the methodology used in the study.

3. The third part of the report is a detailed
description of the results of the study.

4. The fourth part of the report is a detailed
description of the conclusions of the study.

5. The fifth part of the report is a detailed
description of the recommendations of the study.

6. The sixth part of the report is a detailed
description of the limitations of the study.

of him, and he regretted exceedingly the annoyance that he had evidently caused Mr. Llewellyn.

Mrs. Llewellyn and her daughter hastened to comfort the crestfallen theorist, and Hester, Laurence thought, was equally solicitous. Another fuss about nothing, at all events, he considered, as he walked back with the rest of the party in the direction of the carriage. Along in Indian file till the path widened, and then Laurence found it impracticable to reach Hester's side, or attract Hester's attention, so engrossed was she with Mr. Engleton's remarks, and so shut out was he by the ladies and gentlemen in his way.

He felt, after a while, a little annoyed at remaining so long in the background—not jealous of Mr. Engleton absorbing Hester's sole attention by his dreamyspeculativeness, not feeling inclined to be jealous even, but vexed with the general position of affairs, and with Hester's indifference to his whereabouts.

The party sauntered on till they reached the slope whereon was Milly Athorpe's cottage, and where Jonathan Fyvie waited for them, handsome and smiling, like a fair hope they had met by the way.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, I think that we have had enough of Wind-Whistle Cleft for one while," he said in his usual shy way, and without looking at those whom he addressed; "Uncle Llewellyn ran by here ten minutes ago as fleet as a race-horse. I could not overtake him myself. Is it a match against time?—and what are the odds? Shall we proceed?"

No reply being offered in the negative, the party swept onwards, whilst Mr. Whiteshell and Milly watched them from the higher ground.

"There's that girl again!" muttered Mrs. Llewellyn.

CHAPTER XV.

NOT QUITE SATISFIED.

LAURENCE, though driven in no very pleasure-able frame of mind towards Tavvydale House, was still of opinion that all would be well, and everything different in the evening. Chance had separated him from Hester, and thrown him into contiguity with those two jackanapes, young Llewellyn and Bowers, who talked all the way back in the carriage about the dogs they had had, and the horses which they had backed for forthcoming races.

“What an uncomfortable kind of afternoon it has been,” he thought when he was in his dressing-room, arraying himself in that full-dress suit which he kept now like one of the family at Tavvydale House; “and what a horrid old woman that Mrs. Llewellyn is! Hanged if she hasn’t almost made mischief about nothing.”

He did not wait in his room until the dinner-bell rang, but went down-stairs into the drawing-room, and thence through the open window on to the lawn, with the hope of finding Hester—just as he had found her once or twice before in the courting-days that were only a little while ago, and yet, for an unaccountable reason, seemed further off than he knew them to be. But though he wandered about the grounds until the bell rang, he was not rewarded with a glimpse of Hester Fyvie, and he returned into the drawing-room just in time to see Mr. Engleton escorting his *fiancée* across the hall, followed by the regular stream of guests assembled there. He was in time, however, to offer his arm to Miss Llewellyn, who was polite enough to say “thank you” for his attention. A meek woman this Miss Llewellyn, with no energy of her race in her—taking everything placidly, and saying but little to any one, if it could be possibly avoided; receiving the snubs of her mother even graciously. Laurence had admired her placidity, just as he had her father’s courage, in an off-hand, desultory way; and possibly of all the “stuck-ups,” as he termed them, who had been eating and drinking lately at Mr.

Fyvie's expense, he liked this apathetic girl the best.

He was glad that she was his companion at the table; she did not expect a brilliant talker—brilliant talk, in fact, always embarrassed her—and as it was not in his line any more than hers, the position probably suited them both. Both could look round them and ahead of them between the courses; and it was strange that both looked more than once in the same direction, namely, towards the positions occupied by Hester and Mr. Engleton.

This was the dullest dinner-party to which he had ever received an invitation, he thought; if the dinner itself had been as flat, stale, and unprofitable as the conversation of the guests assembled to do justice to it, what a position Mr. Fyvie would have lost in the county! It was one of those stupid overgrown dinner-parties, too, where strange faces glowered at every corner, and people intruded upon one's path, whom one hoped never to meet again, under any possible circumstances. We have all had these ghastly nights at our friends' table, and set the result down to bad taste in selection, instead of to our dark hours when good people with wings at their backs would have been voted regular bores.

He had never seen such a hideous conglomeration of people in his life, thought Laurence—all the objectionable company that had held possession of Tavvydale House for the last month, added to a round dozen of specimens of polite society in the neighbourhood—fellows who could talk of nothing but horses and hounds; fellows with white neckcloths, who had brought their divinity with them, and fellows who could not talk at all, and had had evidently no other purpose in coming, save to make an onslaught on the meats and drinks provided for the occasion. Then there was Mrs. Llewellyn, to crown all; towering above everybody, and overshadowing everything, talking at one end of the table in a loud voice that was heard at the other, sitting with her elbows squared and partaking of every dish that came round to her, in quantities that even startled the footmen.

“When does Mrs. Llewellyn think of going home?” asked Laurence suddenly, and not too graciously of his companion.

“Papa returns to the office next week, and we shall accompany him, I daresay.”

“You have had a long holiday,” he remarked thoughtfully; and then brightening up suddenly,

lest his tone of voice should have suggested his wish to see the family out of the house, and so have pained "the best of the lot of them," he added, "I hope that you have enjoyed yourself at Tavvydale?"

"Oh, vastly."

"It is a pretty place."

"Yes, and one meets with nice company here."

"Yes—very," was the dry response; and that was the substance of the conversation which Laurence Raxford supported at the dinner-table whilst the ladies were present.

When the ladies had withdrawn—and he noticed that Mrs. Llewellyn put her arm round her niece's waist affectionately as they passed out of the room—he was compelled to launch forth a little more, to respond to a few remarks of his host and senior partner, smiling like a 'father at him from the head of the table, even to discuss the rules and regulations of a charity school in the vicinity with an enthusiastic young curate next to him, until Mr. Engleton, scenting a subject, dashed in with *his* views of charity schools, which had been, he asserted, the one study of his life. Then some one proposed the health of the partners, Fyvie,

Fyvie and Raxford, and the senior member of the firm, smiling in his friendly way towards Laurence again, insisted upon Laurence returning thanks as the youngest member of that flourishing undertaking amongst the Dartmoor hills. The senior had responded for his health as host, and was not going to have all the talking to himself, and Jonathan Fyvie never spoke if he could help it—he was always too nervous, he said, to face a general community. Laurence returned thanks briefly, and dropped into his seat again in a more morbid condition of mind than he had risen in therefrom. He was glad when a grand move was made at last for the drawing-room, and when it was in his power, being very near the door, to beat the first retreat, and pass across the hall into the large drawing-room, and seat himself at Hester's side, without any preliminaries. Hester was talking to Aunt Llewellyn as he crossed the room, and he noted that the conversation suddenly ceased as he came within ear-shot. If that old woman had not already begun to make mischief, it was odd to him!

“Not intruding upon any gunpowder treason, I hope, ladies?” he said, with an affected light-

ness of demeanour that was far from well done.

"Oh, no," said Hester shortly.

Hester was still inclined to resent the afternoon's want of confidence; she had not half "served out" this young man yet. Time enough presently for a general amnesty, a few tears shed upon his shoulder perhaps, and a delightful reconciliation. Hester was already looking forward to that picture in the future, and it was becoming uphill work to keep him at a distance; but poor Hester thought that she had a duty to perform to herself, and if she did not assert her supremacy—her rights—in the early days, what would be her position in the latter ones, when their engagement was an affair of long standing? He must know her better, and have no secrets from her—live no life apart from her—and *this*, in the fair beginning of their hopes together, would be a lesson to him!

So Hester said, "Oh! no," with the Fyvie sharpness, that was *not* pleasant to the ears of him whom she addressed.

"Then I shall not be considered an intruder," said Laurence, taking his seat on the couch where no room was made for him by the drawing closer into its folds the voluminous silk skirt of the maiden.

"Hester, *is* anything the matter?" he asked.

"N—no," answered Hester slowly; "what should there be the matter?"

"Then if nothing's the matter, there remains no occasion for any remarks upon nothingness," said Laurence; "but I had a faint idea that——"

"That what?" said Hester quickly, as he paused.

"That you were offended with me."

"Oh! no," said Hester, tossing her head this time.

Laurence objected to these negatives; they encumbered his way to the explanation that was necessary, and he thought Hester did not shine in this false light at all.

"That Mrs. Llewellyn may have said——"

"Excuse me, Laurence, but Mrs. Llewellyn has said nothing," interrupted Hester; "and however much you may dislike or fear Mrs. Llewellyn, I hope that you will not mention her name in that disrespectful way to me—her niece."

Laurence was taken aback at the reproof, and gave vent to his astonishment in a very unrefined way.

"Well, *that* is a good one," he said emphatically.

"May I ask what you mean by *that* expres-

sion?" said Hester, emphasizing her demonstrative pronoun also.

"If I haven't heard you speak in the most *un-niece-like* manner of that estimable lady, Hester."

"I did wrong, then, and you have done worse by imitating me. I love Aunt Llewellyn very much indeed."

"Well, that's very kind of you, and I wish that I could follow your example."

"Don't insult me, Laurence. I can bear want of confidence better than a mock—mocking satire!"

"Hester, I'm going to put every confidence in you, if you'll only listen patiently."

"I don't want to listen."

"I thought that you *were* more patient, upon my honour—not so childish, pettish, irritable—what is it?"

Hester turned round at this reproof; he was indeed beginning early to school her into submission; he was not likely to gain a patient hearing, or be readily pardoned, after that last expression.

"Very well, sir," she said between her closed lips—"very well, sir!"

"But if you will look like the Hester of a week ago—just for one minute—I will——"

"Mr. Raxford, you may favour me with an explanation of your eccentricities, when I ask for it," cried Hester, more pettish and childish than ever now; "and if you'll take the trouble to pay a little more attention to my mamma, instead of making yourself and me ridiculous before a roomful of people, it will be all the better. Mr. Engleton, will you attempt this duet with me that we practised last night?"

"I—yes—certainly," cried Mr. Engleton, who was advancing at this juncture; "but I'm out of voice—very—to-night."

Laurence gave a hasty rub to his curly hair with both hands, and made no effort to supplant Mr. Engleton in his escort of Hester to the piano. All this was very new and very puzzling, but it did not irritate him, so much as it surprised him. He had believed Hester Fyvie to be one of the most amiable girls whom he had ever encountered, a good-tempered, light-hearted, merry girl, with whom a man might naturally fall in love,—not a girl ready to take offence at every trifling misconception, and to revenge herself, in her own way,

upon him for his share in it. He was surprised, then—more, he was sorry ; and had Hester turned at that juncture, she would have been startled at the sorrowful, wondering face which was bent in her direction.

A keen-eyed old gentleman, who seemed ever on the watch, noticed it, instead of his daughter.

“Why, what ever are you looking so dismally at, Laurence?” asked Mr. Fyvie in his partner’s ear ; “is Hester in one of her teasing moods, or have you and she been teasing one another?—nothing wrong—eh?”

“Wrong, sir!—I hope not,” said Laurence, shaking off his dull impressions at once ; “not even a lover’s quarrel yet awhile. I don’t like quarrelling—it’s not in my way.”

“Neither does my girl—God bless her!” said the old gentleman, rubbing one hand briskly over the other ; “so you will be a very happy couple. She’s full of spirits, and fond of teasing people at times ; but if ever there was a good, sound-hearted girl, it’s Hester—she’s the flood of sunshine in the house of Fyvie!”

The father slapped Laurence on the back, as though he congratulated him on that sunshine

which would gladden the younger man's house in good time; and Laurence felt it steal to his heart again whilst Mr. Fyvie spoke.

"Yes," he said, "I saw how she brightened home when I first came here, innocent of all your good intentions."

"And fell in love accordingly—falling into the snare, too, which I, like a crafty old huntsman, had set for you. Well, it all comes round like a pleasant story-book, and I have nothing to perplex me;—a good partner to take care of Jonathan, and a good son to take care of her. Laurence, I'm as happy an old dog as ever lived!"

"I wish sometimes that you had not this high opinion of me," said Laurence restlessly.

"That's an odd wish," said Fyvie; "why, if I had not had the highest opinion, do you think that I would have set my heart on you, boy, all these long years? You are just the man that I prophesied your mother would make of you, if left to herself. There's all the frankness and good-temper of that mother, and the humility of your father, allied to a perseverance that is all your own; and so you are Jonathan Fyvie's friend, too. Gad, sir, these are something like compliments from old

Jonathan, too ! 'Let us go and talk to Mrs. Fyvie now ?'

Laurence was surprised at this second intimation of Mrs. Fyvie's presence, and it struck him then that both father and daughter were anxious that the mother should be as interested in him as they were. And possibly Mrs. Fyvie had not received a fair share of his attention, and he had taken her languid ways, her listlessness concerning all mundane matters, too much as a matter of course, and she had, despite all this, expressed a word or two concerning his inattention. He made amends at once ; he rather liked Mrs. Fyvie, despite her stateliness. She was a lady who had suffered too much in life to smile readily at the life around her ; but for all that she was a true lady, suggesting no thought of her Brobdingnagian sister.

Laurence and she got on very well together for the remainder of the evening. Laurence devoted himself exclusively to the mother, and by the story of his week's experience at Wheal Desperation, the mistakes he had committed by relying too much on his book knowledge, and the scoldings in consequence that one or two captains, who were his

teachers—Captain Athorpe amongst the number—has scrupled not to bestow upon him, brought the smiles to Mrs. Fyvie's worn face.

Laurence was not afraid of putting himself in a ludicrous light at times for the better effect of his anecdotes, and he had a graceful as well as straightforward way of relating his incidents of actual experience, which told in his favour with all listeners. He pleased always when he was anxious to please, as we have already remarked.

Mrs. Fyvie reclined in her easy-chair, and thought, too, that Hester was a lucky girl to have become engaged to this young man—that it was a good thing for everybody, after all, though there was no money on his side. Her sister had not thought so; her sister had said more than once that it was a mesalliance, arising out of an unnatural partiality on the part of Mr. Fyvie for Laurence; and she had had a dreamy idea once or twice that though Mr. Fyvie must have his own way, still Hester might have done better, until Laurence did good service for himself that evening by paying his respects to "dear mamma." Still Laurence watched Hester from the distance; he had a faint hope that she would veer round in his direction

presently, making the *amende honorable* by that course of action, just as he was making amends for any pain he had given her by submission to her last orders. And Hester was pleased—very pleased—to see him at her mother's side, and in a day or two she would accord her free forgiveness, she thought. But on that evening, not at any price, even the price of his reverent submission! The dear fellow must fully understand that she was not to be treated like a child—although he *had* called her very childish—and that there were plenty of people in the world ready to fall down and worship her as well as Laurence Raxford. He must be proud and jealous of the love which he had won—which, she thought, with the Fyvie pride predominant just then, she had let him win too easily.

So she coquetted faintly enough, and in all good faith, with Mr. Engleton, who certainly liked it after his first surprise, and seconded her little scheme for making her lover miserable; whilst the lover, not miserable at all—and that was the most annoying part of it!—chatted away by her mother's side, laughed heartily once or twice, and almost made the mother laugh. Once she fancied that

he was looking anxiously, even reprovably, in her direction, but that might have been fancy! He certainly was not half so angry with her as she was with him—*ergo*, said this young lady, with a leap forwards to an objectionable conclusion, he did not care half so much about her.

“What a desperate flirt that Hester is,” said Mrs. Llewellyn, confidentially, in her sister’s ear, tilting her chair backwards from the card-table, the better to convey that verdict to Mrs. Fyvie—“why don’t you ask Mr. Raxford to stop it?”

Laurence started at this intrusion on Mrs. Llewellyn’s part, but he was on his guard now, and answered readily enough for himself,

“Mr. Engleton will not try to cut me out; he is too good a friend of mine,” said Laurence; “he is only detailing to her, after all, one of his pet schemes. I can tell that by his animation.”

“And you’re not a bit jealous?” asked Mrs. Llewellyn, with evident interest.

“Upon my honour—not a bit.”

“Every confidence, Laurence,” murmured Mrs. Fyvie; “that’s well—for she deserves it.”

“Yes—but there was a something once,” croaked

this Roman-nosed bird of evil omen, "between Mr. Engleton and Hester—you told me so yourself, Charlotte."

"I fancied so," said Mrs. Fyvie, quite scared by her sister-in-law's charge, "and told you so. But neither Mr. Fyvie nor Hester would believe anything of the kind."

"Now, ma'am," testily cried a gentleman at the card table—the very gentleman who had expressed his anxiety to be introduced to Mrs. Llewellyn, "will you have the goodness to lead? We're all waiting."

Laurence felt a shade more annoyance after this, though its evidence rose not to the surface. If the poor design lurked in the mind of any one present to annoy him, he would be more likely to die, than to show any sign of dissatisfaction. He felt, after Mrs. Llewellyn's avowal, that he had a harder part to play, but he played it admirably, and deceived all lookers-on.

"I suppose that you will come more frequently, when you are better acquainted with mining operations, Laurence?" asked Mrs. Fyvie after this.

"Being sure that everybody will be glad to see

me more frequently," answered Laurence ; "to be sure I will."

"Everybody will be glad of that," she said, "and you haven't found us really at home yet, Laurence. That is without all these good people, who are excellent company, but try one's health very much. You cannot conceive," she said languidly, "what an effort it is for me."

Laurence had not witnessed any vigorous effort on the part of Mrs. Fyvie to set her guests at their ease, but that good lady always believed that she exerted herself considerably, and, at any rate, showed just as complete signs of exhaustion at the end of the evening as though she had. After a while she dozed off, and Laurence, anxious not to disturb her, rose gently, and joined Miss Llewellyn for the few minutes that remained before the party broke up for good.

When the outsiders had gone home, and the insiders were bidding each other good night, Laurence offered his adieux with the rest—coming round at last to Hester's side.

"Shall I see you again before I leave to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," said Hester, surprised for an

instant, and then vexed at having exhibited her surprise, "you do not stop till Sunday, then?"

"I shall not begin holiday-making yet awhile, Hester," he said; "at ten o'clock to-morrow-morning, I shall be at Wheal Desperation."

"If you're in so great a hurry, nothing that I can say will induce you to remain longer, of course. Good night."

"Shall I see you to-morrow before I go?"

"No—you will not," was the rapid answer to his question.

"Very good," said Laurence; "will you wait here for a few minutes, then."

"Thank you, but I'm in as great a hurry to get to my room to-night as you are to run away to-morrow."

But she waited all the same, although Laurence, taking her at her word, and not believing for an instant that she would alter her mind, went up to his room, and locked himself in for the night.

Jonathan tried the handle of his door, half an hour afterwards.

"What!—the key turned on all intruders Laurence," he cried; "I was coming to smoke one of my cigars with you, old fellow. Not asleep yet?"

"Trying, Jonathan."

"Ah! then I'll not disturb you. Good night."

"Good night."

Laurence Raxford, if he were trying to sleep, was adopting a very extraordinary method of doing so. He was sitting in his shirt-sleeves on the edge of his bed, studying the pattern of his carpet. His face had lost all its pleasant expression, and had become very grave and earnest; he had looked far less thoughtfully at the moon, the last time we accompanied him to this chamber.

At the table, on which a light was burning, were writing materials, and an unfinished letter. As Laurence had not caught in any violent degree Mr. Whiteshell's habit of soliloquizing, probably the letter may afford a clue to this young man's ruminations.

There is a suspicious paragraph, that may stand for his thoughts—and it, at least, tells us of what he has been thinking.

"Everything bright around me, dear mother, and no future for you to be anxious about any more.. All the romance gone out of me, too—you who said I was too romantic for everyday life! Here am I, who had a dreamy

idea of marrying a sylph, or something of that kind, engaged to be married to Hester Fyvie, a fair sample of that everyday stock against which I have more than once energetically protested. Hester sends her love."

When Laurence had done thinking, he re-read his letter, and then tore it quietly into fragments. He was evidently resolved not to do anything in a hurry ever again.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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